

Young Klondike

STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

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"Jump!" snarled Bill Boggs. "Jump, or we'll blow holes through your heads!" But Young Klondike and the Unknown still hesitated, for to jump and miss their footing on the other side meant certain death.

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YOUNG KLONDIKE'S WINTER CAMP;

OR,

MINING UNDER THE SNOW.

BY AUTHOR OF YOUNG KLONDIKE.

CHAPTER I.

THE RUSH TO NINE MILE CREEK.

WINTER had set in and Dawson City was prepared for its five months' isolation from the civilized world, when the whole town was thrown into a fever of excitement by the announcement of the great gold discoveries on Nine Mile creek.

Young Klondike happened to be in Dawson City at the time and so were his partners, Dick Luckey, Edith Welton and that mysterious little man who accompanied him in all his wanderings.

We refer to the detective who passed under the name of the Unknown, for the excellent reason that he preferred to keep his identity secret. To no one—not even to Young Klondike himself—had the Unknown revealed his name. So this certainly could not be his errand when he burst into the room in the hotel where Ned Golden and Dick Luckey were still in bed, shouting at the top of his lungs:

"Get up, boys! Get up! No time for snoozing now! I've got something I want to tell."

"Is it your name?" asked Dick, with one eye open, putting his head out from under the clothes.

"Not much!" echoed Young Klondike, from the other side of the bed. "When the Unknown tells his name he's going to take a day off to do it, and he won't choose so cold a day as this, you bet."

"Why, it is cold," replied the detective, seating himself beside the bed. "The mercury has got down to fifty below this morning. By the Jumping Jeremiah, I think the end of my nose was nipped in the night."

"Tell us your news," said Young Klondike. "But first of all, what time is it?"

"It's half-past four," replied the detective, with a chuckling laugh.

"Half-past four! What in thunder do you mean by waking us up at such an unearthly hour?"

"Business!"

"What business?"

"Ned, there's been a big strike up at Nine Mile creek."

"No!"

"Yes, sir!"

"How do you know?"

"Heard it just in Paddy Grogan's gambling house about eleven o'clock last night. Saw the crowd around the place and went in to see what the row was about."

"That hits us hard," said Dick.

"You bet it does! We've got a hundred acres along Nine Mile creek."

This was the true state of the case.

A big gold discovery on Nine Mile creek might mean a great deal for Young Klondike, or rather for the firm of Golden & Luckey, as their partnership was styled.

Ned knew at once that the Unknown must have made some highly important discovery or he never would have come in and wakened them at this early hour.

He sprang out of bed and began pulling on his clothes, while the detective stirred the fire, which had been kept up all night in the sheet iron wood stove.

"Tell it, Zed—tell it!" he exclaimed. "If there is anything that concerns our Nine Mile creek purchase we want to know it, that's all."

"It concerns us just this much—there's going to be a rush to Nine Mile creek."

"When?"

"Right now!"

"To-day?"

"You bet! There's half a dozen parties getting

ready for an early start this very morning. If they squat on our land and jump claims you know what the result will be."

"Phew! I should say so! We've got to go to Nine Mile creek, Dick. Get up! Don't waste a minute! We must dress and call Edith. There's no time to be lost."

"Edith is already called," said the Unknown, in his abrupt way. "I attended to that."

"Then we've got to get a dog sled, and——"

"The dog sled is already got. It's at the door now."

"Hello! You are prompt, old man."

"Well, now, we've got to be prompt if we expect to accomplish anything in the way of heading those fellows off, and don't you forget it."

"It's like you to see to all this. I suppose the provisions are all laid in and the mining tools, and instead of one dog sled there are three or four; in fact, you've got everything in shape to start a winter camp."

"That's what I have, dear boy. When I set out to do anything I don't let grass grow under my feet."

"Even if you sit up all night to do it," said Dick, "and I make no doubt that's what you have been doing now."

Dick had hit the situation exactly.

The minute the Unknown saw that big display of golden nuggets brought into Paddy Grogan's by two prospectors down from Nine Mile creek, he knew that there was bound to be a rush to the new diggings.

It was characteristic of the man to go right to work and prepare for the journey without disturbing his friends.

He went on to describe what had been said by the prospectors as the boys finished dressing.

A little later they all went down into the parlor where Edith was found waiting for them.

"So we are off on another journey it seems," was her greeting, as Ned and Dick came hurrying into the room.

"So it seems," replied Ned, "but it's only to Nine Mile creek."

"That's fifty miles; quite enough of a trip with the thermometer at fifty below."

"Perhaps you'd better not go, Edith."

"As though I would consent to be left behind! I guess not! If you boys are going, I'm going, too!"

This was Edith all over. The brave girl was always ready for any new enterprise which might come up.

"There's at least six parties going to start this morning," said the Unknown, coming in just then, "and among others is one led by Bill Boggs."

"Bill Boggs! He's the fellow we drove off our claim up on El Dorado creek?" demanded Ned.

"That's who he is!"

"Exactly. Well, then, there's going to be trouble sure. Bill Boggs swore that he would be revenged on

me. He knows well enough that the Nine Mile creek belongs to us."

"That's what he does. The only thing for us to do is to be first on the ground, and start work going. Once we've done that all of those fellows will have to come to us if they want to do any gold digging on the creek."

"Is everything ready for a start?" asked Edith.

"Everything," replied the Unknown.

"Then the sooner we are off, the better," said Ned, and he led the way down-stairs.

Early as was the hour many people were stirring in Dawson City that morning.

Men muffled up to the eyes were darting out of one building and into another.

Lights twinkled in the store windows, dog teams were flying here and there, for the miners had provisions to purchase and many preparations to make before it would be safe to start on the long journey up the frozen Klondike to Nine Mile creek.

There were three big sleds, with six dogs each, in waiting in front of the hotel.

These were the best teams in town, and belonged to one Francois Le Bault, a professional dog raiser, who made a business of supplying teams to anyone who wanted them.

In being first on the ground to engage the Le Bault teams and Le Bault himself as driver, the Unknown had done a very shrewd thing.

Moreover the detective had been most thorough in his preparations. Of course the fact that he had unlimited capital to work with helped him along.

On one sled was a full supply of mining tools, picks, shovels, pans, etcetera. On the next provisions enough for a month were loaded, and on top of the load were two tents strapped down.

The third sled was reserved for Young Klondike and Edith.

This was big enough for four, but it was only proposed to take three.

Le Bault was to drive and Ned and Edith to be passengers.

Dick was to drive the second sled, changing off with Ned from time to time, and the Unknown was to drive the third.

In spite of the early hour, quite a number of men came out of the hotel to see the party start.

"B'gosh, them boys don't let grass grow under their feet none," said a grizzled miner who stood near the bar-room door. "Here's this strike only given out last night, and now they are on their way to the Nine Mile creek. Wish to goodness it wasn't so cold and I'd go with them. Hello! Here comes Bill Boggs! B'gosh! he's off for the creek, too!"

Around a corner, at some distance down the street, a dog-team came flying, driven by a rough-looking fellow, wrapped up to the eyes in a blanket coat.

Young Klondike caught sight of him almost as soon as the old miner did.

In Dawson City, when the thermometer is away down below zero, it is difficult to recognize one's best

friend, but Ned recognized Bill Boggs, and shouted to Francois to start the team.

"Don't let him get in ahead of us!" he cried. "If we can get the lead we ought to be able to keep it."

All was ready and Francois, with a twirl of his whip, brought down the lash upon the forward dogs.

Away flew the sled toward the levee, where it was to pass out upon the frozen river.

"Hooray, hooray for Young Klondike!" shouted the old miner.

Many took up the cry.

Ned Golden was a very popular character in Dawson City.

The dogs trotted down the levee and out upon the ice, followed by the sleds driven by Dick and the Unknown.

The rush to Nine Mile creek was on, for Bill Boggs was right behind them, and there would be a dozen other sleds out of Dawson City during the day.

But as usual, Golden & Luckey were ahead of all competitors.

Young Klondike was off for his winter camp.

CHAPTER II.

LOST IN THE STORM.

It is dangerous work traveling by dog sled up the Klondike with the thermometer at fifty below.

No part of the body can be exposed for an instant without freezing. The only wonder is that the dogs can hold their own. And yet, Young Klondike and Edith felt comfortable enough. They were now well used to this sort of thing and knew just how to prepare for it.

Ned wore a bearskin coat which reached from his head to his heels with a hood coming up around the head.

Fur gloves and a thick woolen mask for the face completed the outside protection. There were thick moccasins, of course, and the eyes were protected by snow goggles, which fit closely.

Edith was similarly attired and Dick was Ned's duplicate, but the Unknown would wear his tall hat—another peculiarity of his—which he pulled down over a thick woolen cap, covering his entire face, with eye holes and breathing place, giving it a chance to also do duty as a mask.

"There comes Boggs!" cried Edith, looking back as they ran off on the ice. "He's going to cut in ahead of us, you see."

The prospector was driving a long sled loaded with goods which carried three men in addition to himself.

Instead of coming down upon the levee immediately behind Young Klondike's teams, as he properly should have done, Boggs had driven his dogs further on, and now suddenly turning, was heading out upon the ice directly across Ned's path.

"That fellow means to crowd us," said Francois. "Wait; I'll give him a dose."

It was a great trick of these dog drivers to cut one another off in this way.

Once the dogs get entangled in their harness, it is very difficult to straighten them out again, and this is very apt to occur when another sled comes flying across their path.

Young Klondike watched Francois in silence.

He knew the man perfectly well. Francois had driven for him before, and he felt that he could trust him to hold his own.

"He means to drive right into us!" cried Edith, after a moment. "He'll get the dogs all snarled up sure. Can't something be done?"

"Trust Francois. Leave it all to him," said Ned.

But Francois just kept on his way, and apparently had no intention of going out of it, until Boggs, who, by the way, was also an expert driver, was right upon him, then all at once Francois pulled his team abruptly around, and rushed head on for the other sled.

It was dangerous business. Edith held her breath.

Francois knew what he was about, and in a moment Boggs saw that he was caught.

He either had to turn or have his dogs hopelessly entangled with those of the other sled.

"Look out of the way there, you blame chump! Where are you driving?" he roared.

"Driving to Nine Mile creek! Hoop-la! Look out yourself!" cried Francois, lashing his dogs ahead.

Somebody had to turn now. Boggs knew that Francois was a most skillful driver and he wisely came to the conclusion that his little game was played out.

He turned his dogs and would have sheered off to the right, but Francois was ready to head him off and turned also, and in such a way as to clear his dogs, and at the same time swing his sled around against the other.

It struck it with fearful force, and it was a trifle topheavy owing to the poor arrangement of its load; over it went and all in an instant Boggs and his companions were sprawling in the snow.

It was a bad job for Boggs.

He held on desperately and was dragged along some distance before he could stop the dogs.

"Ah, there! Stay there!" cried the Unknown, as he and Dick went flying past.

Young Klondike was already far in advance, and they left Boggs breathing vengeance, and went flying on up the frozen river.

This was the first brush with the enemy, but the end was not yet, as Young Klondike was destined to learn.

A run of twenty miles was made before daylight, and that meant after nine o'clock.

As soon as it was light enough to see, Ned rose up on the sled and took a long look behind them.

"You won't see him," said Francois, "for he ain't there."

"We've distanced him entirely!" shouted the Unknown from the rear shed. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, Francois, that was the slickest thing ever I saw!"

Francois gave a grunt and drove on. He was a man of few words, and did not care to talk about what he had done.

"Do you think it would be safe to stop for breakfast?" asked Ned. "I'm getting rather hungry, and I'm sure we'd all feel the better for a cup of hot coffee and something to eat."

"Perfectly safe," replied Francois. "I'm ready to bet that Bill Boggs had his harness broken. It will take time to patch it up, and anyhow my team can knock his out any day in the week. He's miles behind."

"Then it's a halt," said Ned, and they selected a place where there was an overhanging ledge of rocks, and the halt was made.

It had grown suddenly warmer.

Ned's pocket thermometer registered only two degrees above zero.

Face masks were removed, and preparations for breakfast began.

While Francois attended to the dogs, Dick and the Unknown gathered wood and built a roaring fire on the snow.

Ned unpacked the provisions and assisted Edith to make the coffee.

In a little while breakfast was all ready and they ate it in peace, for nothing was seen of the enemy, if Boggs could still be considered such.

Be that as it might there was another and more dangerous enemy approaching, and Francois was the first to become aware of that fact.

It was not clouding over, but the wind was sighing dismally among the spruces. Francois looking about uneasily, declared that there was going to be a storm.

"Do you feel sure of it?" asked Ned. "I've been watching the wind. It's in the right quarter for snow, to be sure, but don't you see there's not a cloud in the sky."

"Can't help that," said Francois. "There's a storm coming sure. You'll see the clouds rise after a bit."

"What makes you feel so certain?"

"Now don't ask me to tell you. I only know it, that's all. If you'd been up here in these parts as long as I have, you'd understand that it is impossible for me to make a mistake."

"You're an old *habitant*, aren't you, Francois?" asked Ned, using the term applied to the French Canadian fur hunters, whose lives have been spent in the frozen North.

"A regular old timer," replied Francois. "I was born at Fort Black, up on Mackenzie's river. My father was a Hudson's Bay Company man before me. I ought to know something about this country."

"Did you know that there was gold here when you were a boy?" asked Dick.

"Why, we always knew there was gold here," re-

plied Francois. "I can remember as far back as when I was a boy the Indians bringing great quantities of nuggets into the fort. We weren't allowed to touch 'em in them days. They all went to the company, but once in a while some of our people would make a strike on his own account. Many a man has made his fortune and left the company's employ to go South and enjoy it, but the thing was not talked about, for we were all sworn to secrecy. The Hudson's Bay Company did not want any rush up this way, and consequently they took mighty good care that nobody should know about the gold."

It was interesting to listen to the old habitant's talk, for he was full of reminiscences of the days when the Hudson's Bay Company ruled this wild land.

Before they could load up the sleds again the sky had all clouded over, and the wind was blowing good and strong.

But as yet there was no snow, although it was now quite evident that it was coming. Still Young Klondike had strong hopes that it would hold off until they could reach the Nine Mile creek.

Splendid time was made as long as the light lasted.

Snow did not come with the going down of the sun as was expected, and after some talk it was decided to push on for two hours more to the camp of the Wellsted Mining Company.

This was quite a large camp. It had once been the property of Golden & Luckey, but not proving profitable they sold it out to a man named Wellsted who struck it rich within a week.

Since then the Wellsted Mine had become one of the institutions of the Klondike. Ned Golden knew that he would be welcome there if they could succeed in making the mine before the storm began.

On they flew, the dogs never seeming to tire until at last the snowflakes began to come into Ned's face.

"The snow is coming!" exclaimed Edith, getting it at the same time.

"How far are we from Wellsted's now?" shouted Dick, who had felt the snow too.

"About nine miles," Ned called back. "We shall be able to make it if we don't get the snow too thick."

They were to get it thicker than Young Klondike had ever seen it before, or was likely to see it again.

Within twenty minutes they were in the midst of a perfect whirl of snow, with the wind blowing a good ninety miles an hour.

It was all that the dogs could do to pull the heavy sleds, for a blizzard—the blizzard of the season had come upon them now.

No talking after that. It was impossible to make oneself heard above the howling of the wind.

No one knew better than Young Klondike how serious it was. If they did not succeed in reaching the Wellsted mine soon, it would be necessary to go into camp somewhere on the shore of the frozen river.

This meant danger to the dogs and perhaps death. Perhaps it meant death to themselves, there was

no telling. Many a party of prospectors had started out with prospects just as bright as theirs had been, and in the end had perished in the storm.

"As long as Francois can stand it I can," thought Ned, and he shouted to Edith to know if she was cold.

"No; I'm all right," replied Edith. "I'm bundled up so warm that it is impossible to feel the cold. I can stand it as long as the dogs can, that's sure."

The trouble was not with the forward sled, and Ned was quite prepared for the worst when a shout from Dick brought them to a halt.

He looked back and saw that Dick had halted his dogs, and so he had Francois pull in.

"Where's the Unknown?" cried Edith. "I can't see him at all."

"Back there somewhere, no doubt," said Francois, brushing the snow off his face with one sweep of the hand.

"We must go back and see what's the matter with Mr. Luckey. I've no doubt the dogs are stuck. I have been expecting to hear from him for the last ten minutes. I don't believe we shall be able to keep on."

Here was interesting intelligence! Ned's heart sank as they hurried back to Dick.

"It's the dogs," shouted Dick. "One of them will lie down. I don't believe I can make them go any further. They are played out."

"Where's the Unknown?" bawled Ned, for the wind was blowing so that it was all he could do to make Dick hear.

"I suppose he's behind. I haven't seen him for some minutes," answered Dick.

Ned raised his voice and shouted: "Zed! Zed" as loud as possible.

No reply came back.

The howling of the wind among the trees on the shore was the only sound.

"The dogs can go no further," was Francois' despairing announcement now. "We've got to give it up, boss. No help for it. We'll have to try to make a camp."

"While you are picking out a place I'll go back and see if I can see anything of the Unknown. I'm beginning to get a good deal worried about him."

"You don't go alone," said Dick. "I won't have that."

"I'll put on the snow-shoes; it's all right," declared Ned, "but I feel worried about the Unknown."

The snow-shoes had been so placed that they could put their hands on them at any moment.

Dick still insisting put on a pair also, and leaving Edith in the care of Francois, the two boys started back through the storm.

To understand the danger of their situation it is quite necessary that one should have been in the far North, or at least have seen a blizzard on our Western plains.

Before they had taken twenty steps, they could no longer see the sleds.

It was as though they were lost in an ocean of falling snow flakes. All was one grand whirl.

"Blow the horn, Ned!" roared Dick, hardly making himself heard.

Each sled had been provided with a horn, in anticipation of just such a necessity as this.

Ned now blew a shrill blast, and waited for the answer which did not come.

This was most alarming, but still the wind was against them, and there was a possibility that the Unknown did not hear.

"Try it again!" shouted Dick. "Heavens! If anything has happened to poor old Zed, I shall be ready to give up in despair!"

Again and again the horn was blown, but the howling wind brought no answer back.

Already the tracks of the sleds were rapidly disappearing. Ned saw that the situation was very serious. It was doubtful if they could reach the Unknown.

"How long is it since you last saw him?" he asked Dick.

"Must be as much as fifteen minutes; it might be more."

"You ought not to have let it run so long."

"Don't blame me, Ned. I had all I could do to look after the dogs about that time."

"Well, now, I suppose you had, Dick, and I won't say a word. What's to be done, though? We can't abandon the Unknown, and for Edith's sake we ought to go back!"

"Blow the horn again. We may be lucky enough to make him hear this time."

Ned put the horn to his lips and blew a fearful blast.

This time it was answered, but the sound seemed to come from the right, and not directly in front of them as it ought to have done.

"We've got turned around!" declared Ned. "That's what's the matter with us. We thought we could hold our own in all this whirl, but the fact is we are no better able to do it than anyone else."

They now pressed boldly forward, expecting every instant to make out the Unknown's sled.

They had not gone far before they heard the horn again, and saw a man coming toward them through the snow.

"There he is! There's Zed!" cried Dick. "The dogs must have given out, just as I supposed."

"Hello! Hello, boss!" shouted the man.

Fancy Young Klondike's feelings!

It was the voice of Francois and not the Unknown. The habitant came staggering up all out of breath.

"Have you found him?" he demanded.

"No, no!" gasped Ned. "We haven't found him at all."

"Then it's too late to do anything now. Unless he can save himself he is lost. There is no help that we can give him. We've got all we can do to help ourselves."

"But we can't abandon him," said Dick. "I am to blame for this! I will never do it!"

"You must! There isn't a moment to be lost in getting back to Miss Edith."

"But our provisions—what is to be done? We may starve before we get through."

"Back! Back!" bawled Francois, above the howling of the wind. "Back as you value your lives!"

The boys turned and followed him, for they saw that there was no time to be lost.

Every moment they expected to see the sleds loom up out of the darkness, but they did not appear.

Nothing was to be seen but that eternal whirl of whitened flakes.

All tracks were now obliterated, even those made by Francois and themselves—something which ought not to have been.

"This won't do!" shouted Young Klondike. "Blow the horn, Francois!"

"No use!" groaned the dog-driver. "I've made a botch of it. Miss Edith has no horn; she cannot reply to the signal, even if she hears."

Young Klondike's heart almost ceased to beat.

He knew only too well what all this meant.

Francois had forgotten which way he came; they were off on another track altogether.

For a few moments they staggered on and then the awful truth was apparent to all.

The worst thing that can happen to any man in the Klondike country had happened to them.

They had been overtaken by the blizzard and were lost in the storm.

CHAPTER III.

THE LONE HUT UNDER THE CLIFF.

To describe the happenings of the next half hour so far as Ned Golden, Dick Luckey and Francois the dog driver were concerned would be tedious, for all they did was to wander on through the snow, hopelessly blowing the horn.

The signal was never answered. It grew darker and darker.

Every instant increased their danger.

Silence had now come upon all. It was no use to talk and very hard to make each other hear.

What they were now aiming at was to strike the bank of the Klondike if possible. Here they might find shelter and save their own lives, while to remain out upon the river meant death.

And terrible as it seemed, all thought of Edith and the Unknown had to be abandoned. They had their own lives to look to and as matters now stood it was doubtful if they could be saved.

At last Ned saw that Dick's strength was beginning to fail him. He had expected this, for Dick was by no means as strong as himself.

"Stop!" shouted Ned. "This won't do! Francois, do you know where we are?"

"No!" bawled the dog driver. "I give it up, boss. I don't know anything about it!"

"Dick, how do you feel? How are you standing it?" asked Ned.

"I'm tired," panted Dick. "If I could only lie down a few minutes I'd be all right. Just long enough for me to get my breath."

"No, no!" shouted Francois. "You mustn't do it! To lie down now means sure death."

"He won't do it," said Ned, throwing his arm about his partner. "Listen, Francois, we are going round and round in a circle. You don't deny that?"

"Can't deny it! That's just what we are doing, boss."

"It must be stopped or we shall all perish. You go one way and we'll go the other. Keep on blowing as you go, and we'll answer. It will give us two chances to one, and may help us to find the shore."

It was so agreed, and now they separated, Ned supporting Dick and encouraging him all he could.

Every moment or two the horns tooted.

For a little while the sounds grew further and further apart, and then seemed to come together again.

Young Klondike thought that they were describing the same old circle; something that everyone seems bound to do under such circumstances as these.

"We'll be together again in a moment," said Ned. "Dick, how do you feel now?"

"Sleepy, Ned."

"Cold?"

"No."

"Great Heavens! don't say it! That means you are freezing. Try to rouse yourself, Dick. Try it for my sake!"

"I have tried, Ned. I am trying—it's no use."

Ned blew the horn again. When the answer came it sounded very near.

All at once a bright light shown out through the darkness, and at the same instant a voice shouting something unintelligible, made itself heard.

"There's Francois, now! He's struck the sled! It's Edith's lantern!" cried Ned. "Brace up, Dick! Once we get you under the bearskins you will be all right! Brace up, old man! You are saved!"

They staggered on, and in a moment saw trees and rocks ahead of them.

The horn was still blowing, and the light grew brighter and brighter until at last the boys, to their unbounded astonishment, saw a small log hut built in under a precipice. The door stood open invitingly, and there was a bright fire burning within. A man stood in the doorway waving a lantern and blowing a horn.

"Look, Dick! Look!" cried Ned. "It's the Unknown!"

Here was a genuine surprise.

"Ye gods and little fishes! Is it you, boys!" shouted the detective. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, I gave you up forever! Thought you were clean lost."

Where's Edith? Where's Francois—where are the sleds and the dogs?"

"Lost. I'm afraid," replied Ned, dismally. "Oh, Zed, we are in trouble. Dick is clean gone. I'm afraid he's frozen. Help me to get his clothes off and rub him down."

It was a time for work and not for talk, but still Edith could not be forgotten and the detective gently reminded Ned of this.

"You are right," replied Ned. "I'll attend to Dick. You keep the horn a-going. I suppose it is all we can do."

So Ned got Dick down by the fire on a big bear-skin, stripped off his clothes, and rubbed him with whisky, something he was most fortunately able to do, for their stores were all at hand.

Outside the hut was a shed, and in the shed was the Unknown's team all right, with all the stores and many of their other belongings aboard.

This saved Dick's life undoubtedly, for he was half unconscious when Ned put him down by the fire.

Fifteen minutes later Dick was stowed away in a bunk, wrapped in the bearskin and fast asleep.

And still the Unknown stood outside the door blowing the horn.

Just as Ned finished with Dick, he opened the door and came in.

"It's no use, dear boy; we've got to give it up."

"Can nothing be done?" asked Ned, dismally.

"Nothing. How is it with Dick?"

"It's all right. How came you here? What place is this? Remember, I know nothing. I thought I knew every camp on the banks of the Klondike, but I don't remember ever seeing this before."

"Don't ask me, dear boy. I know nothing of this place, not even how I got here. When I lost Dick I made every effort to overtake him, but I drove and drove and hollered and yelled and blew the horn till I was hoarse. All no use. I couldn't make it and the next I knew I was here at this hut. What was there for me to do then but to put up the dogs and build a fire? Nothing; and by the Jumping Jeremiah, I did it, and had no more than finished than I heard your horn blow."

There was plenty of time for Ned to tell his story, for the night wore on and brought no change.

Of course there was no thought of sleep.

At intervals the horn was blown, but the wind blew out upon the river, and the sounds were whirled away.

If Edith and Francois still lived it was quite possible that they might hear the horn, but the answering signal must inevitably be blown away.

As morning approached the storm began to abate, and when Dick woke up just before daylight, it was gone.

"Where in the world am I, Ned?" exclaimed Dick, raising himself in the bunk.

Explanations followed.

From the time Francois left them Dick remembered nothing and yet he had walked a long distance through the snow.

"It's terrible about Edith. Terrible!" he said. "We never should have left her. We might have known that the Unknown would land on his feet—he always does."

He had scarcely spoken, when a horn sounded outside.

All ran out of the hut, Ned seizing the horn and blowing a tremendous blast.

It was immediately answered, but that was all the good it did. They could see nothing, for drifts mountain high, were all about them. The answering signal came from beyond the drifts, and it gave them hope, but with that they had to be contented, for their shouts remained unanswered except for the occasional blowing of the horn.

"There's someone over there," said the Unknown, "and we've got to dig out. Take it easy. Don't doubt that those people, whoever they may be, are all right. If they had not found shelter they must have perished in the storm."

Morning now began to dawn. As the sun rose Ned looked around him and gave a great shout.

"Well, well, well!" he cried. "This is great business. Know what place this is, Dick?"

"No," said Dick. "Of course I don't."

"And you, Zed? You can guess who owns this house?"

"I can guess all day, but shall I ever hit it? I think not."

"We do."

"No!"

"You bet!"

"You must be crazy!"

"Not much. This is our camp on Wild Cat creek. We built it last spring."

"I'll be hanged if it isn't," said Dick. "And I'll bet you what you like Edith and Francois have got inside the other house."

"Prove it!" cried the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, prove it! There's nothing strange in my not recognizing the camp on Wild Cat creek, seeing that I was never here before."

This was true enough. The history of the Wild Cat creek camp was simply this. The previous spring some prospectors brought down rich samples of gold to Dawson City, and exhibited them on Young Klondike's new Mining Exchange. They announced that they had been discovered up Wild Cat creek, a small stream that ran into the Klondike just above its union with Bonanza creek. The two prospectors declared that they were sick of mining in frozen ground and wanted to sell, and Young Klondike bought out the claim for a comparatively small sum.

Shortly after this Ned and Dick went up the river to examine their new purchase.

Edith and the Unknown did not accompany them having other business on hand.

They were so pleased with the prospect that they went again later and built two huts, one on the bank of the creek, and another in a deep gorge about a

hundred yards away, where the outlook was equally promising.

Ned's idea being then to divide the claim and sell half, but other matters calling for immediate attention about that time, the whole scheme was abandoned.

It was small business for the firm of Golden & Luckey. They were the owners of many such claims, and at the time winter set in this one had not been taken up again, and it was safe to suppose that everything remained at the huts just as it had been left in the spring.

"But it can't be the Wild Cat after all!" exclaimed Dick. "How could we ever have got here? Those huts are a quarter of a mile up from the Klondike."

"It is quite possible that we wandered off the river and got up the creek."

"Do you think so?"

"Why not?"

"Prove it!" cried the Unknown. "Prove it!"

"Easily done," said Ned. "There should be a closet out there in the shed. I built it for tools and other odds and ends. You'll find the tools in it now, and an old hat of mine. I ought to have the key on my bunch—yes, here it is."

Proof was ready at hand, for when they went into the shed, there was the closet and Ned's key opened it. The tools were there, and so was the old hat. There could be no doubt that this was the camp on Wild Cat creek.

"Well, well, this is strange that we should drift in here," said Ned. "I built this for a summer camp, but it turns out to be a winter one. Lucky thing I did it. This same winter camp has been the means of saving our lives."

Toot! toot! went the horn again. Whoever their neighbors were they were still signaling.

All they could do was to blow in answer, for shout as they would there was no reply.

"If we could only get up there on the rocks we might get a view of the other hut," said Ned, suddenly. "I remember a place where one can look right down into the valley."

"We might do it if we could fly," said the detective; "otherwise I don't see how it's going to be managed."

"What's the matter with climbing up from the roof?" suggested Ned. "I've done it before, and I think I can do it again."

"Don't see how. The rocks overhang the roof."

"I'll show you. Remember, you don't know this place, and I do."

"Shall I go, too?" asked Dick.

"No; you stay here and keep the horn a-going. We won't be gone but a few minutes. You know how it's to be done."

"Yes; I remember all about it," replied Dick. "Go on, Ned, there'll be no trouble at all."

The Unknown had kept the snow brushed back from the front of the hut during the night, which was

fortunate, for otherwise it would have been banked up against the door.

He and Ned now hurried into the shed where the dogs were comfortable enough, and brought out a ladder which was placed against the hut, reaching to the roof.

As has already been explained, the hut was built under the shelving rocks, and when the Unknown climbed up on the ridge pole—there was no snow here—he saw that there was an opening in the rocks through which the sky could be seen.

The sides were much broken and offered a series of natural steps up to the top of the cliff, and there was really no difficulty in making the ascent.

In a moment Ned and the Unknown stood on a broad shelf, where they could overlook the drifts and see just what sort of a place they had struck during the night.

"Oh, yes, this is the Wild Cat creek camp all right," declared Ned. "I might have known it. See, there's the Klondike! Heavens, how much snow has fallen; but there is not so much up here."

This was true; owing to its exposed position the ledge had been swept clean by the wind, and it was possible to walk quite a distance along its length without meeting any snow to speak of.

"The other hut should lie right over here," declared Ned. "Come on, I'll show it to you in a moment."

The detective hurried after him and they were rapidly approaching a break in the platform, a natural rift which ran back through a wider gorge above the platform line, when all at once a slight sound behind them caused Young Klondike to look around.

Three men, armed with rifles, were creeping after them over the rocks.

It was Bill Boggs and two of his friends.

"Hands up! We've got you now, Young Klondike!" shouted Boggs, seeing that they were discovered.

He leveled his rifle at Ned and fired, shouting again:

"We mean business. We don't propose to be run down without being paid for it somehow."

And as he called out, Bill Boggs took a shot at the Unknown.

CHAPTER IV.

BESIEGED BY BILL BOGGS.

DICK heard the shots and took them for signals. He never dreamed of trouble up there on the rocks.

But serious trouble had overtaken Young Klondike and the Unknown, for although neither of the shots took effect, Boggs and his toughs had the drop on them, and they were powerless to defend themselves.

To refuse to obey the orders that came now simply meant death.

"Drop them guns! Chuck down them revolvers!"

These were the first orders they got.

It went very hard with the Unknown, and he obeyed with many words of protests, while Ned wisely held his tongue.

While the two men held them covered Boggs drew a ball of strong cord out of his pocket, and proceeded to tie Ned and the Unknown hand and foot.

Protest was useless.

Ned tried to reason with them, and the Unknown was loud in his demands to know what it all meant, but Boggs would not say a word until the tying was through.

"Now, then, ye can talk all ye like, consarn ye," he growled. "I thought that horn blowing would fetch you up here, and so it did."

"Then it was you that blew the horn?" demanded the Unknown.

"Yes, it was. We came in here last night. Our sleds are down to t'other camp, and we don't want no neighbors here—no."

"Wait a minute, Boggs, explain what you are driving at," said Ned. "You know that after playing this trick on me you can never return to Dawson City—you know that well enough?"

"Do I?" growled Boggs; "well, now, I don't know nothing of the sort."

"You'll find out then blame soon," put in the Unknown. "If you know which side your bread is buttered, Bill Boggs, you'll untie us and go about your business at once."

"Now looker here," said Boggs, "I don't want no chin music, gents, and specially none with you, old man. I've got a word to say to Young Klondike, and I want to say it without interruption; are you listening to me, young feller? "'Cause, if you hain't I'd thank you to tell me when you are."

"Speak," said Ned, "I'm as ready to listen now as I ever shall be. Say your say, and then I'll say mine."

"Well, boss, my say is that you've got to die, and you've got to die right now. I shall give it out that you was lost in the storm, and I'll prove it, because your bodies will be found in the snow drift. Then I shall be rid of a feller what I always hated, and at the same time I shall be left free to jump this here claim. That's the talk. That's what I'm driving it. Ha, ha, ha! You thought I was heading for Nine Mile creek, but that was only a bluff. This here is the spot I've fixed my heart on and I'm going to have it, and as a matter of course I can't get no good title to it till after you're dead."

Ned listened in utter amazement.

All this sounded very much like the raving of a crazy man.

He thought fast, and above all he thought of Dick, for from Dick alone could help come now.

"What in the world do you want of this claim?"

he demanded. "What does it amount to more than a thousand others? Why should you desire to take my life to get possession of it, especially in the dead of winter when you can't work it to any advantage? Bill Boggs, I always knew you were a rascal, but I didn't think you were a fool."

"Enough!" cried Boggs. "I want no more chin music. Dick Luckey is to be settled with yet. Toddle on, you two! Get a move on you—go now! Quick, or I fire!"

"Better kill us outright than drive us ahead here!" cried the Unknown.

"You fool! Don't you see that I'm giving you a chance for your life?" sneered Boggs. "I'm superstitious perhaps, but in spite of what I said just now about killing you I believe in giving every man a chance. If you can jump that there rift and clear it, why then you shall live, for all me. If not—well, you know what. You're goners, and your bodies will be found in the snow?"

"But stop and think!" protested the detective. "How much easier——"

"Jump!" snarled Boggs. "Jump! or we'll blow holes through your heads!"

But Young Klondike and the Unknown still hesitated, for to jump and miss their footing on the other side meant certain death.

"We can't do it!" gasped Ned, "but we've got to go!"

"One—two—three!" shouted Boggs.

Before the last word was spoken, Young Klondike and the Unknown jumped. They could not help it, for they knew it would be the death shots next.

They missed, of course—it could not have been otherwise.

Down into the rift they went whirling and were gone.

Bill Boggs looked over the edge, but could see nothing of them.

"I guess their goose is cooked all right enough, boys," he declared. "Young Klondike never guessed what a rich claim he had here, and he never will now. Come; Dick Luckey is next. We've got his hash to settle—then we'll take possession of our house and make ourselves to home."

Thus saying Bill Boggs, followed by his two companions, walked back along the ledge by the way Ned and the Unknown had come.

It seemed rather strange that a man who had shown so much shrewdness as this villainous outlaw—for Boggs was nothing less—should be so foolish as to take the death of Young Klondike for granted, but this is exactly what he did.

Never was anyone more mistaken.

Young Klondike and the detective were not dead—they were not even injured.

Away down at the bottom of the rift some sixty feet below, Ned and the detective were now lying half buried in a snow drift.

Boggs had not counted on there being snow enough down there to do this good work.

But the situation was still very serious. Being tied as they were, Ned and the detective were entirely unable to help themselves. Every move they made drove them further down into the drift, and as it was they were almost up to their necks.

"Be careful, dear boy!" exclaimed the detective. "Try and work your way forward, but don't let yourself get head under—you're gone if you do."

"How can I help it?" demanded Ned. "I seem to be sinking deeper and deeper every moment. Oh, Zed, this is a bad job!"

"Don't despair, dear boy. Try to think where you are—do you know anything about it at all?"

"I ought to know, but the snow changes the appearance of everything so."

"It blinds my eyes, too. I can't see a thing. Wait a minute! Wait a minute! I don't give up yet!"

"It should be the gorge where we built the second camp," said Ned after a moment, as he began to collect his wits.

"Think so?"

"I'm reasonably sure of it."

"Then we are not out of the woods yet. If I understood Bill Boggs he has located himself in the other camp. Where does this gorge lead to, dear boy?"

"Away into the mountains. It turns about five miles up and makes its way back to the Klondike again."

"It is not wide here?"

"Not more than twenty-five feet."

"And there's a stream running through it?"

"Yes."

"That's enough. Stay where you are, Ned. It's life or death. I'm going to put it through the drift."

"Put it through to where, for Heaven's sake? You'll only get buried deeper and deeper."

"Don't say it! I claim that along the stream in the middle of the gorge where the wind has a sweep, no such drift as this is possible. I'm going to make a rush and see."

"And if you get stuck?"

"Then good-by! I'm a goner. It will be but a small loss."

And the Unknown boldly pushed his way through the drift.

He was head under in an instant. Ned trembled for his safety, the man was so helpless with his hands tied.

But in a moment he heard him calling:

"All right! It's all right! Come on, Young Klondike, come on!"

So much for a little enterprise.

A moment later and Young Klondike and the Unknown were standing on the frozen stream, where there was no snow. A log cabin, similar to the one they had left, stood before them. The door was open, there was a fire burning inside, and a dog team under the shed, all just the same as they had left the other cabin.

The Unknown was standing in the doorway, trying his best to shake off the snow.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we did it!" he exclaimed. "I knew we could! What a queer place this is! See! the drifts are all around us. Look at that pass into the mountain! Never saw anything so strange. It's a regular iron gate, that's what it is! If those big overhanging rocks should take a notion to fall, the pass would be completely blocked. It's a regular fortress, that's what it is!"

"Let's see," said Ned; "right under those rocks is where I hid the rendrock cartridges which I intended to use to break up the frozen ground. I could block up that pass easy enough if I was to touch off the whole box, but that's neither here nor there, Zed; what we want to do is to get free."

"We might burn off our bonds by the fire."

"And burn ourselves into the bargain; no, I thank you. The risk is too great."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I've done it. I was a prisoner among the Apache Indians in Arizona in '68, and I did that very thing."

"Do you propose to try it now?"

"I do. Something has to be done. You can see for yourself that this place is where Boggs came in, although how he got here beats me."

"The snow has covered his tracks, I suppose."

"He'll make tracks back here in a minute after he has done poor Dick."

The mere mention of Dick's danger drove Ned half wild.

"Come, I'm ready to burn off these cords!" he cried. "Dick must be saved."

"No, no! I'll do it! I'll roll myself on the floor, if my clothes take fire, and——"

"Hello! Hello!" shouted a voice outside at the same instant.

They looked out through the door and saw Dick coming over the drifts on snow-shoes, rifle in hand.

Help had come when they least expected it.

Dick came down over the drift, and was amazed enough to find Ned and the Unknown in such a plight, but it took but an instant for him to whip out his knife and set them free.

"Haven't seen anything of Boggs," he declared, as Ned hurriedly told what had happened. "Fact is, I thought I'd come around to this camp over the drifts, so I started almost as soon as you did, and a deuce of a time I've had getting here, too."

"Wonder how they got out?" said the Unknown. "Of course they didn't go over the drifts. You've seen no trail, Dick?"

"None."

"Blame lucky thing you came."

"It's my business to be lucky. I'm lucky by nature as well as by name. We ought to get back again if we are to save the dogs and the grub, but upon my word I don't see how it is going to be done, unless we go single file."

"On the snow-shoes?"

"Yes; there's no other way."

"They are there by this time probably," mused Ned. "It would mean fight for us to do that."

"Not a bit of it! There they are!" cried the Unknown, suddenly pointing up the gorge.

Sure enough, there were Bill Boggs and his two companions coming down the gorge on the run.

Evidently they had been to the hut and found it deserted.

They had come down over the rocks at a place where they were bare between the hut and the narrow pass which the detective had called the "iron gate."

There was just time to shut the door, and shoot the heavy bolt inside when Boggs and his men came rushing up.

They banged on the door, shouted, threatened and made a lot of loud talk, but get in they could not, for the hut was well built and designed to resist the attacks of Indians.

"Come out of there! Come out of there and surrender, or we'll burn the roof over your head!" was Boggs' last threat, when he had tried every way possible to effect an entrance.

But Young Klondike felt sure they would do nothing of the sort. The hut was too valuable to Boggs if he meant to make his winter camp here.

So the prisoners just remained quiet, and let Boggs and his crew bang away.

It went on for an hour and more, and at the end of that time the situation was just the same.

Young Klondike, with the Unknown and Dick, was still besieged in the hut, and there was no prospect of any relief.

CHAPTER V.

CLOSING THE IRON GATE.

It was a most provoking situation for Young Klondike and his friends, and what was worse it kept up all day, or at least as long as daylight lasted, which was until shortly after two o'clock.

When darkness settled down over the gorge there they were, still prisoners in the hut.

To attempt to leave the place now until daylight came would be highly dangerous. It would be almost certain to result in all hands being lost in the drifts.

Three times the Unknown had ventured to open the door and peer out, when, for a little while, all was still.

Each attempt brought failure, and a whizzing shot and a rush for the door.

In each instance the detective was successful in bolting the door again, but nothing was gained by the risk he ran, beyond the assurance that the enemy meant to keep on the watch.

It was rather a gloomy situation when night set in at last.

The fire had now died down and it grew piercing cold in the hut, for all the wood there was inside had been burned up, and it was impossible to reach the sled where there was plenty more stored away without opening the door.

"Wonder if this thing is going to keep up all night?" growled the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, I don't like the idea of it much. We shall freeze to death before morning, that's one thing sure."

"And so will they," said Dick. "Unless they sleep in the shed."

"Or go over to the other hut," said the detective. "They would be safe enough in doing it if they knew a way over the rocks, as they evidently do."

"I know the way well enough," said Ned. "It's pretty dark now. I move we make a sally. Perhaps we can get to the trail."

"We can't go the other way over the drifts?"

"No, no," said Dick. "It is useless to think of it. The one who has the snow-shoes would get along all right, but Heaven help the others. They'd be down in the snow head under in just no time at all."

"I'm going out to reconnoiter," said Ned. "Give me the rifle. You keep the door open. Show no light, though. I'll trust to the stars to guide me back."

The Unknown pleaded hard to be allowed to go in his stead, but Ned wouldn't listen.

When Young Klondike undertook to do a thing he did it, if there was any possibility of its being done.

His first move was to stand several minutes in the open doorway and wait.

No shot came, and he heard no sound. Ned began to think that the enemy had retreated to the other hut, and he walked slowly up the gorge, following the bed of the stream, with the intention of finding out whether the way was clear to the trail which led up out of the gorge over the rocks.

He soon discovered that this was the case, and was just about to return to the hut to announce his discovery, when a light further up the gorge attracted his attention.

"There they are!" thought Ned. "They couldn't stand it. Too cold, I suppose. They've gone into camp under the rocks."

He was determined to know, and he crept on passing through the "iron gate," taking particular care to keep in under the shadow of the rocks.

He was thus able to draw near the camp of the outlaws unobserved.

A roaring fire had been built in a sheltered spot, and Boggs and the others were sitting around it eating supper.

Young Klondike saw that they had helped themselves to his stores left in hut No. 1, and they seemed to be making themselves very much at home.

"We are perfectly safe to stop here till morning," he heard Boggs remark. "They can't possibly get out over the drifts, and if they come this way to look

for the trail by the rocks, we shall certainly see them in time to make a move."

There was more said; a lot of it. Young Klondike was amazed at the bitterness with which Boggs alluded to him. The reason for his spite seemed to lie solely in the fact that Ned had been successful and he hadn't.

So success brings enemies as well as friends, it would seem. These men were dangerous enemies, but in spite of all this Bill Boggs served Young Klondike a good turn, as he stood there listening in the shadow of the rocks.

At last Ned moved away, shot across the gorge, and crept up under the great overhanging rocks, which formed the left hand wall of the iron gate.

"I can do it," he thought, "and it won't kill them either if they remain where they are now, as they no doubt will."

He pondered a moment, and then reached in under the rocks.

No snow of any consequence had drifted in here, and Young Klondike had no difficulty in finding what he wanted.

This was a square wooden box hidden away in a sort of pocket under the ledge.

The box contained rendrock cartridges. There was enough in it to blow the whole side of the mountain down as Ned very well knew, for he had put the box there with his own hands.

Taking out his big jack-knife, he softly pried the lid open, and taking an armful of cartridges, hurried back to the hut.

"Great Heavens! I'm glad to see you back again!" cried Dick; "but what in the world have you got there!"

Rendrock cartridges," answered Ned.

"What to do with them? By the Jumping Jeremiah, don't bring them in here!" exclaimed the Unknown.

Ned laughed.

"Don't you fret about the cartridges," he said. "I ain't going to blow us up, but I am going to get rid of our enemies, if I can."

"Blow them to blazes. It's a desperate situation, but I don't believe in wholesale murder, dear boy."

"No more do I. Don't intend to murder anyone. Scrape up those coals, Dick, and get a little heat there. We've got to thaw these cartridges out.

Now it must be explained that rendrock freezes at a high temperature, and a frozen cartridge cannot be easily used.

Ned placed the cartridges against a box so that their sides were exposed to the fire and kept turning them from time to time.

It was a dangerous occupation, for to let the cartridges get too hot meant the end of the hut and death to all hands, but Young Klondike had often thawed rendrock before, and he kept a sharp lookout not to let them get too hot.

While they were heating he told a part of what he

had overheard—but not all of it by any means—and fully disclosed his plan.

The Unknown highly approved, but Dick was doubtful.

"We'll make sure that they are still by the fire before we do the job," said Ned, and when the cartridges were fully thawed out all three crept back to the iron gate.

There sat Bill Boggs and his gang around the fire just as they had left them.

They were passing the bottle now, and seemed to be quite under the influence. Apparently they had forgotten all about the prisoners in the hut.

"This is our time," said Ned. "We'll go right at it now. Give me six minutes more and I'll close the iron gate."

He then put the cartridges back in the box, mixing them up with the frozen ones, and attached a cap and long fuse to one which was well bedded down among the rest.

"Will it do the business, dear boy?" questioned the Unknown.

"Yes, and more than do it."

"You think the frozen ones will go, too?"

"Sure of it. The force of the explosion will start them, although it would be impossible to work a frozen one simply with a cap and fuse."

"It's good-by Bill Boggs, if he happens to move."

"That's what it is. For his own sake let us hope he won't. Get back now. I'm going to touch it off."

They stole back to the length of the fuse which Ned lighted.

Then they returned to the hut and awaited results.

It seemed a long time—so long that Dick was sure the fuse must have gone out.

But it hadn't. All at once there was a tremendous explosion, followed by a crashing of rocks which shook the earth.

Wild shouts rang out the same instant, and then all was still.

"They're alive all right!" cried Dick. "But the iron gate?"

They ran forward, up the gorge, to see the result of their work.

It was most satisfactory. The mouth of the gorge was entirely blockaded by the great masses of rock which had fallen from the surrounding walls.

Young Klondike's scheme had been a complete success.

The iron gate was closed.

CHAPTER VI.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK.

THE question now was whether Bill Boggs and his men would be able to climb over the fallen rocks.

They could be heard running about on the other side of the closed iron gate calling to each other, and

it was perfectly evident that they were looking for this very thing.

Young Klondike watched and listened for some time, when it became evident that they had given it up as a bad job, for the sounds were heard no more.

"This settles it," said Ned. "We may as well make ourselves comfortable now; there's a good ten mile tramp ahead of them before they can get around to us, and it's my opinion they won't try it. When they get out of the gorge they will be near the Wellsted mine, and by that time they'll be so near played out that they will probably stop there awhile."

"Then we'll get back to the other hut, and put in a quiet night," said Dick. "Is that the idea?"

"No, sir," replied Ned. "We'll stay right where we are. I ain't going to risk breaking my neck going over the rocks."

So they returned to the hut, and building up a roaring fire sat by it until daylight, taking turns at sleeping, but two remaining up and ready at all times.

This proved to be quite unnecessary, however, for there was no alarm.

Daylight came at last. A hard crust had now formed on the snow, for the temperature had taken another tumble and the tops of the drifts during the night became as smooth and easy to travel as a road.

"We may as well drive the dog team around," said the Unknown, "don't you think so, dear boy?"

"No," replied Ned. "What I'm proposing to do is to drive our dogs around here."

"And why? The other hut is by far the best place."

"Who says so?"

"Why, it is, of course. There's plenty of wood there, and it's more sheltered. Besides, we shall be able to see Bill Boggs if he comes down the river, to say nothing of Edith and Francois."

Ned held up his hand and turned away a good deal effected. It was understood between them that no mention of Edith's name should be made.

Of course it was their intention to immediately go in search of the missing girl, but they had no hope of finding her alive.

"I give up," said Ned. "We'll go to the other hut, dogs and all."

"Any good reason why we shouldn't?" asked Dick. "It strikes me, Ned, that you are keeping something back."

But Ned gave him no satisfaction, and a few moments later they started back with the dogs.

A short ride down the canyon brought them to the turn where Wild Cat creek emptied into the Klondike, and the hut was in sight.

The Unknown, who was driving, instantly reined the dogs in.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, do you see that?" he exclaimed. "I'm afraid we are going to drop into the soup after all."

There was smoke coming out of the chimney of the hut, and the glass in the little window was white

with frost, proving that there was a roaring fire inside.

"Someone ahead of us," said Dick. "I suppose it must be Boggs."

He had scarcely spoken when the door of the hut opened and out stepped Edith.

Oh, what a rejoicing there was then!

Words can scarcely describe the scene which followed.

Be very sure it did not take the Unknown long to get the dog sled up opposite the hut.

There was Edith safe and sound, and Francois had just stepped out for wood.

They had reached the hut late the afternoon previous, after passing the night and a portion of the following day out on the river exposed to the full fury of the storm.

It was a lucky thing for Edith that Francois succeeded in reaching the sled, for he had been able to rig up a rude shelter out of blankets and furs which kept them from freezing.

Thus the night passed and Edith's life was saved, but every dog perished in the storm, and it was on foot that Francois conducted the brave girl to the hut after it cleared away.

They had no idea what camp it was, but the discovery of the Unknown's dog team in the shed gave them hope.

Now all was explained, and Young Klondike's party found itself on something like its old footing again.

A roaring fire was built, and Edith prepared a good breakfast.

Bill Boggs' gang had evidently been in the hut and had helped themselves to some of the provisions; but no great quantity had been taken, probably for the reason that they had not been able to carry them over the rocks.

"I suppose we start on for Nine Mile creek as soon as we have finished breakfast?" remarked Dick, after the meal was well advanced.

"No," said Ned, quietly, "I've given up the Nine Mile creek scheme."

"Given it up!" exclaimed Edith. "In all my acquaintance with you, Ned Golden, I never knew you to do a thing like that."

"Without good reason," said the Unknown. "Ned has his reasons, you may depend."

"I'll bet you," said Dick. "I was just waiting for him to say that. I felt it in my bones that we were not going to get out of here so quick."

"Your bones told you the truth, then," laughed Ned, "for it is my intention to stop right here and make this our winter camp, send Francois to Wellsted's for help if there is any to be hired, and to warn them against Boggs and those other fellows. If he can head 'em off there and have them taken, we'll run them down to Dawson and turn them over to the police."

"Just so," said the Unknown, dryly, "but what's the meaning of all this?"

"You heard what Boggs said when he had us foul that time?"

"Of course I did."

"Well, I heard more while I listened to their talk at the iron gate."

"And enough to tell you that this was as good a winter camp as any other, I suppose."

"Exactly."

"Where does it lie, dear boy?"

"Around in the creek near the other hut."

"Just so! Now I see why you wanted to stay there. Hooray for our side! There's a fortune awaiting us under the snow."

This was exactly the state of the case, for according to Bill Boggs this winter camp of Young Klondike's was likely to prove an exceedingly rich one and Boggs, tough though he was, knew enough about mining in the Klondike country to make it certain that he would not be very likely to make a mistake.

Ned told all he had overheard, and his friends fully agreed with him that it would be better to transfer their quarters to the hut in the gorge.

Francois was accordingly dispatched to Wellsted's, and the rest of the party moved around to the other hut and spent the day gathering wood and making such arrangements for their comfort as were necessary.

Goods were unpacked and everything fixed for a permanent stay.

Toward sundown Ned and Dick surveyed the creek and fixed upon the spot where Bill Boggs claimed to have made a rich haul of nuggets three weeks before.

It was not easy to locate it; they could not be certain that they were right.

Boggs' story was that he had taken the nuggets directly out of the creek bottom.

Unless this was true he certainly lied altogether, for in no place was the ground turned up that could be discovered. Still, it was hard to be certain of anything, for whatever traces of previous mining there might have been in the gorge before the storm came, they were now buried under the snow.

The last thing attended to that night was the frost fire. To mine under the snow it is necessary to melt the snow before one can begin.

An immense heap of wood had been gathered by Young Klondike's orders the previous spring, the trees being felled on the mountainside, and tumbled over the cliffs into the canyon.

This wood lay in a great heap a hundred yards or so from the spot where they decided to dig, and all that was necessary now was to drag the logs up.

All winter work in the Klondike country is begun in this way, and in spite of the terrors of the cold season there is a good deal of mining done.

The gold here lies about twenty feet below the surface in the form of dust and coarse grains, with nuggets from the size of a pin head to that of a pea, mingled in.

Of course there are larger nuggets often found—Young Klondike in previous workings had unearthed

many big ones—but the average is as stated, and such a claim as this with a good deposit to draw from pays well. The only trouble is to reach it through the frozen ground.

Here the ground is always frozen to a depth of from ten to twelve feet. Thus frost fires are necessary at all times, and it does not make so very much difference with the digging whether the work is begun in winter or summer, although for many other reasons—principally because of the supply of water—the warm season is preferable, of course.

There was no sign of the enemy when they bolted the door for the night, and worse, of Francois returning, although for this they had scarcely hoped.

Outside the frost fire was blazing fiercely, shedding a weird light over the rocks and snow. Inside all was warm and comfortable; Edith put a really excellent supper on the table, and an enjoyable evening and a quiet night was passed.

Ned and Dick took turns in watching and feeding the frost fire, Edith and the Unknown slept the night through.

By six o'clock all were up and immediately after breakfast work began in earnest.

The embers were cleared away and there was the bare ground beneath, for the fire had settled down into the melting snow.

Ned's first care was to mark out the line of the shaft six feet by four.

Its location was close to the creek, and ran parallel to it.

The Unknown went to work to cut a hole in the ice, while Ned and Dick began the digging. Water would be necessary for working in case they saw indications of gold before the usual depth of twenty feet was reached. But no such indications were found.

For four days work on the shaft continued, and nothing came of it.

The ground was frozen very hard, and constant renewal of the fire in the shaft was necessary. At length they passed below the frost line and struck black sand.

From the morning of the second day, Young Klondike had outside help on the work, for Francois arrived from Wellsted's, accompanied by two stout miners, well used to this sort of business.

He reported that nothing had been seen of Bill Boggs and his gang. If they turned up at the Wellsted Company's camp, they would be promptly arrested, the superintendent promised Francois.

This was very satisfactory. Young Klondike's party could now rest secure, and the work went right on until the frost level was passed, as we have said.

Now the gold washing began.

This was done inside the shed where a roaring fire was kept up to melt the ice for water. The sand was brought in and dumped into the rocker which was so arranged that the water poured into it passed outside by means of a trough run through the weather boards.

In no other way could the washing have been carried on, for it was still very cold.

Indeed, Young Klondike's party had not seen a day with the thermometer above zero since they came to their winter camp, and every morning it stood all the way from twenty to forty degrees below.

The first day's washing did not show anything more than a color, and for the two days following it was just as bad.

Sunday came and no work was done; on Monday morning Ned ordered the shaft sunk five feet deeper in the hope of striking a richer deposit.

This was done, and it took two full days to do it, for the cold was so great that the ground would keep freezing, even in the shaft, and frost fires had to be kept constantly going which hindered the digging very much.

On Wednesday morning washing began again, and there was a little gold left in the rocker each time.

All this was very discouraging. Certainly nothing had been found so far to account for Bill Boggs' great anxiety to hold this camp.

"We haven't struck the right place yet, that's what's the matter," declared the Unknown, that night as they all gathered around the fire in the hut. "There must be something for us here under the snow, or Brother Boggs never would have gone on the way he did. Question is where is it? I'll be blest if I wouldn't like to know."

"I ain't going to stay here much longer if we don't strike it soon," replied Ned. "No fun mining under the snow, and if we can't make anything out of it where's the use."

"Wish we could have captured Boggs and made him tell," said Dick. "It seems a pity to have all our work for nothing."

"My idea is that Boggs actually opened a shaft somewhere here during the summer," said Edith. "That's the only explanation. Probably it is filled up with snow now, and lies hidden under one of the big drifts."

This was discouraging enough, for there was no chance of getting at the secret before spring.

A few days' earnest work followed, but the yield was so small and the prospect so discouraging, that when Ned knocked off the men on Saturday night, he made up his mind not to waste any further effort on the shaft which it had cost him so much labor to dig.

"We must wait for Francois to come in," he declared, "and if nothing turns up by the time he gets here I think we may as well quit and go on to Nine Mile creek and look after our interests there."

Francois had gone to Dawson City for provisions, and was not expected back until the following Wednesday, which would give several days' leeway; but the outlook was very discouraging, and Young Klondike fully expected to abandon the winter camp when he went to bed that night.

Next day there was a most remarkable change in the weather—something almost unheard of in the Klondike country during the winter months. The

temperature rose rapidly during the early morning, and by ten o'clock it was above freezing with every appearance of a storm.

At noon it began to rain and it poured all the rest of the day and all night, and was still raining next morning.

Of course everything was under water in the gorge. The ice in the stream was not melted, but a new stream formed on top of it, and came rushing down through the valley sweeping everything before it. The hut was entirely surrounded by water and the snow was melting everywhere. It was a strange state of affairs altogether, and when it cleared off that night it still remained warm.

"This ought to show up something," said Edith, as they sat down to supper. "We must make a thorough examination of the whole ground to-morrow. If I am right and Bill Boggs did actually start a shaft here, we ought to be able to find it out."

It was well enough to be hopeful, but when he turned in that night Young Klondike had no idea that Edith's plan would prove a success.

Ned was soon asleep, and under ordinary circumstances would have remained so till morning, but shortly after midnight he was suddenly awakened by the loud barking of the dogs in the sheds.

"What's the matter out there, Ned?" called the Unknown, who had also been aroused.

"I'm sure I don't know, but I'm going to find out," replied Ned, leaping out of the bunk.

"I'm with you. Where's the lantern?"

"I put it on the table here. It's gone now."

"Strike a match!"

"I'm looking for one! Gracious! Listen to that! The whole house will come down!"

Some heavy body had come in violent contact with the hut, shaking it tremendously. The dogs barked louder than ever. Ned found the lantern and hastily lighted it. Seizing his rifle he ran out of the hut, followed by the Unknown.

"Look out!" shouted the detective. "A bear! A bear!"

It was nothing else! Edith had hung a leg of pickled pork up against the side of the shed the night before, and there was a big black bear trying his best to get at it.

The appearance of the lantern startled him. He stood on his hind legs for an instant, and then made a rush for Ned and the Unknown.

Ned dropped the lantern and clapped the rifle to his shoulder.

Before he could pull the trigger the Unknown banged away and nipped the bear somewhere, but did not kill him.

This was enough to start bruin off on the run over the snow, and to make matters worse the Unknown managed to kick over the lantern which left them in comparative darkness.

"Confound it all, I might have killed him if you hadn't been so previous!" cried Ned. "Now I can't see to get a shot."

He ran after the bear, but it was very dark, and the brute was in sight one instant and out of it the next, as he trotted away among the drifts, and somehow Ned could not manage to get a shot until he came almost to the iron gate.

There was a big drift here—too big for the bear to go around—it nearly choked up the path.

There was consequently nothing for bruin to do but to go over it, and as he started up, wallowing through the softened snow, Ned blazed away again.

"You hit him!" cried the Unknown, dashing in ahead. "You hit him, but you didn't kill him. By the Jumping Jeremiah, you are no better shot than I am! Wait till you see me finish the job."

He ran on and started over the drift. Ned heard his rifle crack a moment later and then a great cry rang out.

"Help! Help! I'm down! I'm a goner!" roared the Unknown.

Running up the drift as fast as the soft snow would permit, Ned saw that the bear had dropped over on the other side.

But the Unknown seemed to have vanished.

He kept on shouting and calling for help, but Ned could not see him at all.

"Where are you?" he cried. "Where are you? Speak up, Zed!"

"Here; here in the drift!"

Sure enough, there was the detective's tall hat right on a level with the snow but a few feet away.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Ned, picking it up and finding the Unknown's head underneath it. "You're there, are you?"

"Don't make fun of a feller when he's down. If you were a true Christian you'd try to pull me out."

"I'll do it! Give me your hand!"

"Give me yours!"

"The bear is all right, and I won't give you my hand, for I want it myself," laughed Ned. "Here, I'll pull you out of the hole if you'll grab my gun. That's the better way."

Fact was Ned began sinking himself, the drift was so soft.

He bent down and held his gun so that the detective could get hold of it with both hands.

But the plan didn't work at all as they thought it was going to, for all at once the bottom seemed to drop out of the drift altogether, and the Unknown went down out of sight pulling Ned into the hole after him.

"Help! Help!" yelled the Unknown, loud enough to wake the dead.

CHAPTER VII.

BILL BOGGS' DIGGINGS FOUND.

THERE was no dead to wake in Young Klondike's winter camp unless it was the dead bear, but everybody alive woke up when the Unknown gave that fearful cry.

Out rushed Dick and the two miners.

Edith put her head out of the window in the loft where she slept and called to know what the matter was, while the dogs barked and yelped, making confusion worse confounded much to Dick's perplexity, for he could not tell at first what the matter really was.

"Ned! Where are you? Speak!" he cried.

"Here! Here! Get a rope and help us out!" came Ned's voice from somewhere, but just where Dick could not seem to understand.

"Get up on the drift!" cried Edith. "Ned's tumbled into the snow—can't you see the trail?"

Dick caught up the lantern and ran up on the drift.

"Look out for yourself!" called Ned. "We are in a hole here, and you'll be on top of us if you don't take care."

"Hello! What can I do for you?" yelled Dick.

"Get boards and lay them down on the snow. Get a rope and drag us out."

"I'll do it. Be with you in two shakes! Anybody hurt down there?"

"No, no! We're all right. Tell Edith not to worry. We've tumbled into Bill Boggs' old shaft, that's all."

Here was great news, and if anything was needed to hurry Dick it would have been this.

He ran to the shed and threw open the door. With the help of the two miners boards were laid down over the snow, and after some difficulty Ned and the Unknown were hauled up not a bit the worse for their adventure, and very enthusiastic about the discovery they had made.

"It's Boggs' shaft, sure!" declared Dick. "That hole runs at least six feet below ground as it is, and we didn't strike the bottom of it. We must start right in to-morrow to dig it out."

Then they dragged the carcass of the bear into the hut, and the remainder of the night was passed in peace.

The coming of such a supply of fresh meat into camp was a perfect godsend, for provisions were getting decidedly scarce.

Ned and the Unknown were up early, and the bear was skinned and cut up before Dick awoke.

He was very fat, and there was enough meat to last for many days.

"Now, for the hole!" exclaimed the Unknown, right after breakfast. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, something has got to pay up for what I went through with last night!"

"What was it you went through, Zed? The crust?" laughed Dick.

"Guess it was! When I first tumbled through the snow, I thought I was down on to the ground, don't you see, but when I tried to catch hold of Ned's gun, down I went about ten feet further, and down came Ned tumbling on top of me; it's the greatest wonder in the world that one of us wasn't killed."

"Would have been if you hadn't caught me," said Ned. "I tell you, Dick, it was really a very serious

business, for I went down all in a heap; but what does Zed do but put up his hands and catch me as quick as lightning. I'll be hanged if he didn't. Caught me as I came down."

"Well, what else was I to do?" asked the detective modestly. "See you break your neck?"

"It isn't everyone who would have been quick enough. You were, though."

"Thank you. I'm usually up and dressed."

"You were pretty well down just about that time."

"Ye gods and little fishes, so I was! I was in a hole for fair that time; but come, don't let's waste any more time talking. We want to get right to work."

It was shoveling snow with a vengeance then. All hands went at it but Edith, and she would have taken her turn if Ned would have allowed it.

By noon the big drift was entirely cleared away, for the snow still remained soft, and there was the mouth of a small shaft and the pile of dirt which had been taken out lying alongside of it, all of which had been covered by the snow.

"This is undoubtedly Boggs' diggings," said Dick. "Of course we didn't dig this hole last spring, Ned, and from what we know it is safe to assume that Boggs is responsible for it."

"It don't make a rap's difference who dug it," said the Unknown; "what we want to do is to find out what's in the pay dirt. We've got to start our fire down there right off quick."

This meant more slow work.

The shaft was six feet deep to the snow as it stood, but it was quite plain that this was old snow banked in and that the hole ran a great deal deeper.

And this proved to be the case.

All the rest of the day was spent digging snow and hauling it up in a basket.

They did not get to the fire by six o'clock, and Ned decided to knock off then, for it was hard working by lantern light.

They went right at it again next morning, and by ten o'clock the shaft measured twenty-two feet in depth, and they struck into the black sand.

To their great satisfaction it was scarcely frozen at all; the snow had protected it. After burning the ground for an hour, it was found to be so soft that it could be easily dug.

"Now, for business!" cried Ned, as the last of the embers were lifted out of the hole. "Send down a pick and shovel, Dick. I'm going right at it, and I shall be mightily disappointed if I don't make a rich strike right at the start."

And Young Klondike was as good as his word.

He had no sooner turned up the first shovelful of sand, than Dick heard his joyful shout.

"I've struck it, I've struck it!"

"Hello!" cried the Unknown, looking down the shaft. "Shall I come down?"

"No; there ain't room enough for two to work well here. I'm right in it with both feet."

"Gold?"

"You bet! The sand is full of it!"

"Send us up a sample, for gracious sake! This is my find! I'm wild to know if it is what we think."

"It's Edith's find by right," replied Ned, shoveling the sand into the bucket. "She said from the start that we'd strike Bill Boggs' diggings under the drift, and there ain't the least doubt but that is just what we've done. Haul away, Dick!"

The Unknown gave a yell of delight as the bucket came up, for the black sand which filled the bottom was fairly bristling with small nuggets and flake gold.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we don't want anything better than this!" he cried. "Is it all the same down there, dear boy?"

"Seems to be," replied Ned, who was busy turning over the sand. "Everywhere I touch it there's gold, and I believe it's a deep deposit, too."

"Let's have another bucket to make sure."

The second bucket proved to be richer than the first, and the third was still better.

"The deeper you go the richer it is," Ned declared. And so it proved.

Before the next day was finished Young Klondike and his friends had washed out over four thousand dollars in nuggets and dust.

Francois came in that night with a sled load of provisions.

No more talk now of giving up.

Young Klondike's winter camp was a complete success, and when a vote was taken it was decided to remain steadily at work for some weeks at least.

Luck continued.

By the end of the first week over twenty thousand dollars had been taken out of the shaft.

Drifts in two directions were now started, and these proved equally rich.

On account of the narrowness of the shaft, it was almost impossible to work more than one man in it, so the first days of the next week were spent in enlarging it, leaving one of the miners to work on the drifts.

Of course this was slow business, but it panned out some seven thousand dollars more by the end of the week.

By the middle of the week following the widening of the shaft was finished, and it was now possible to work to better advantage.

Net results of the work of the next week, thirty-two thousand dollars.

Here was another rich mine for Young Klondike.

Everything was going on in fine shape at the winter camp.

But the winter was now wearing away and nothing had been heard of Bill Boggs.

He had not appeared at the Wellsted mine nor anywhere else.

Ned began to wonder if death could have overtaken the toughs in the gorge, and he talked a good deal about it until one day he declared that he meant to go up the gorge and ascertain.

Everybody opposed the plan, but Ned's mind, once made up, there was no such thing as turning him.

"Very well," said Dick. "If you will go, then I'll go with you, but how are we going to get over the rocks?"

"Easy enough with a ladder. You better remain here. I shan't be gone more than a few hours. Anyhow, I want to prospect the gorge. It isn't at all likely that all the gold brought down by the stream has been concentrated at that one spot. I believe there's good diggings to be struck further up."

"Yes, no doubt," said Edith, "but how do you expect to strike them under the snow?"

"Oh, we've got pretty well used to mining under the snow by this time. I'm looking for the source of this stream. My idea is that it comes out of some cave. I'm looking to find gold that way."

It was finally determined that Dick should go with Ned and a ladder was built to reach to a break in the rocks at the iron gate from which Ned felt sure he would be able to climb to the top of the fallen mass.

This was easily accomplished, and once he was on top Ned saw that by letting the ladder down to a ledge they could easily reach the bottom of the gorge. They tried it that afternoon, and the descent was accomplished without much difficulty.

Next morning he went down again with Dick, and with their rifles over their shoulders the two boys started off up the gorge.

It had been one continuous cold spell for many days now and this morning the thermometer stood at fifteen degrees below zero.

This would be considered cold enough for all practical purposes in the States, but up here in the Klondike it was nothing.

Wrapped up as they were in great bearskin coats, with warm boots, hats and gloves, the boys never gave the weather a thought.

"Hello!" cried Ned, before they had gone far. "I think we've struck it about right, Dick. What do you call this but a trail?"

"It has been one, that's sure," said Dick, looking at the half obliterated footsteps in the snow, "but, Great Scott, Ned, it can't be Boggs' trail! It has snowed three or four times since then."

"Nobody said it was the trail they made that night. It's a trail all right enough, though."

"Admitting that it is theirs, then they must have made it since."

"You're right."

"Time of the last storm, which was a week ago?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"It isn't very pleasant to think of them still hanging around here. Why in the world didn't they go out of the gorge at the other end?"

"Now you are asking me too much. It's perfectly plain that they didn't go out of the gorge, and if they didn't they must have had some mighty good reason for staying in."

"A strike?"

"What else can it be?"

"Is all this land ours, Ned?"

"Every inch of it, Dick. We run clean through to the Wellsted line. This is just what I supposed. Boggs has struck a good thing on our land and he's working it. Now, I don't propose to let him do anything of the sort."

"Why, Ned, we've got enough down there at the camp. Why not let them alone until spring? Then we can bring up a big force and hunt them off our land for good and all."

"Perhaps I shall do that, but I want to know where they are at just the same."

Seeing that Ned was still persistent Dick said no more, and the boys continued to follow the trail up to the gorge.

It led them on for about a mile, and then to their great perplexity suddenly stopped.

"What's this mean?" exclaimed Dick.

"It's a puzzler," replied Ned, "hanged if it isn't. Plenty of snow further on and no footprints—what can it mean?"

It was easy enough to put the question, but there was no one to answer it; indeed, there seemed to be no answer possible; there was just as much snow beyond and the width of the gorge was entirely too great to permit anyone to spring over to the rocks where a footing might indeed be had, yet the trail stopped short without rhyme or reason. It was certainly very strange.

The boys wandered on for a considerable distance, but saw no more of the footprints.

The gorge grew narrower and the walls so high that they almost appeared to meet above.

There seemed no use in going further, as the morning was advancing and they knew that Edith would be worried if they did not return in time for dinner.

"We'd better start back," said Ned. "All we can record is a failure and a mystery. By Jove, I wonder what there is about those disappearing footprints. I'd give a hundred dollars to know."

He was to find out sooner than he thought for, and in a way anything but agreeable to himself.

The boys were hurrying back along the gorge when Dick suddenly caught sight of a gray fox darting along over the snow.

He fired, and was quick enough to hit the fox which ran limping around a point of rocks just beyond the end of the trail.

"By gracious, I've lamed that fellow!" cried Dick. "I must get him. Come on, Ned."

He did not wait for Ned to come on, however, but went dashing off at full speed while Ned, feeling rather tired, walked on as before.

Dick did not see the fox when he got around the point of rocks, but just as he was about to give him up, he caught sight of the sly beast crouching under the ledge.

Another shot fixed him, and Dick, tying a string to his legs, slung him around his neck.

Twice he called to Ned while doing this, but got no answer either time.

"What in thunder is the matter? Why don't Ned come along?" he thought, as soon as his mind was off the fox.

Again he shouted, and still receiving no answer, hurried back around the point of rocks.

Ned was not there.

He had vanished, and the strange part of it was that his footprints ceased to show themselves right at the end of the old trail.

CHAPTER VIII.

YOUNG KLONDIKE RISES IN THE WORLD, SEES A BIG NUGGET AND FINDS HIMSELF FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

WHAT had happened to Young Klondike?

Like most mysterious happenings the explanation of this is very simple, when it comes to be told.

When Ned reached the end of the trail he heard Dick's second shot at the fox, and his shout that he had killed him.

This shout Ned answered, although Dick did not hear him, and then he stopped to examine the trail again, pondering on the mystery.

All at once something dropped down from above.

It was nothing less than a rope twisted into a big slip noose. It fell right over Young Klondike's head, and in a twinkling was pulled up tight under his arms.

Ned struggled to shake it off but it was no use, and before he could utter a sound a stone struck him on the head knocking him senseless.

If Dick had seen Young Klondike then jerked up into the air at the end of that rope, with his head hanging down and arms and legs all limp and lifeless, he would have been sure that he was dead.

Up on a projecting platform which jutted out from the wall of the gorge stood two men pulling at the rope.

One was Mr. Bill Boggs and the other one of his companions on the night of the storm, a fellow who went by the name of Long Charley in Dawson City. A noted gambler, claim jumper and all-around tough.

"Well done, Charley!" said Boggs; "by time, we got the little snoozer without having the botheration of going after him. I knew well enough he'd come our way in course of time."

"Pull steady and quit your talk," replied Charley. "We've got his body, anyhow, but it wouldn't surprise me one bit if he was dead."

"I'm afraid he is. You made a mistake in throwing that stone."

"Afraid! I thought you wanted him dead?"

"No. I've changed my mind. So long as we couldn't work our prospect hole down there, I say let's work Young Klondike. If we hold him a pris-

oner, Luckey and the detective will pay big money to get him free again. Let Luckey go back and tell his friends how mysteriously Young Klondike disappeared."

By this time they had drawn poor Ned up to the level of the platform.

It required some little maneuvering to get him on top, but at length they managed it, and Ned was laid out unconscious at their feet.

"Is he dead?" asked Charley.

"I don't know. He lies awful quiet."

"I don't believe he is. It was an ugly knock, though; you can see his head is all cut."

"Well, dead or alive, we've got him, and I'm glad of it. Let's pack him up to the mine."

They picked Ned up between them, and carried him back upon the platform, up some rocks and then into a cave, where they threw him down beside a smoldering fire.

By this time he had begun to revive. The knock-out blow from the stone had stunned him—that was all.

"Look out!" cried Charley, "he's coming to his senses. He'll show fight the first thing you know!"

And in truth Boggs jumped on Ned just in time to prevent him from drawing his revolver.

"None of that!" he cried, tearing the weapon from Ned's hand before there was time to cock it. "Don't try any game like that, or I'll do you right here and now!"

"Tie him! Tie him!" cried Charley. "Don't muss with him no more."

Ned made a hard fight for it.

No use.

The two toughs got the best of him, and he fell back upon the blankets panting.

"What do you mean by it, Bill Boggs?" he demanded. "Where is Dick Luckey? Where have you brought me to? I'll make someone pay for this!"

"Hello! You are getting steam up, aren't you?" sneered Boggs. "I like to see a fellow have a little life into him, blame me if I don't. Here, hold him, Charley. I'll get the hands tied, then we can go through him. Gee whiz, I like to hear a man talk who would try to blow his fellowman sky high with dynamite, and that's what you did to me, Young Klondike, and you know it, too."

Ned saw that he was in a bad box, and that all talk was useless.

He laughed and tried a bluff game then.

"Well, boys, so you've got me?" he said, while they tied him up and went through his pockets. "I suppose I might have expected it. I had no business to come into the gorge."

"That's what," growled Boggs. "Where did you suppose we were all this time—dead?"

"I didn't know. That's what I came in here for—to see."

"Well, you've found out. How are you making out mining under the snow, Young Klondike?"

"Pretty fair."

"I'd have been over to see you if I could have got there, but you headed me off so I couldn't. Never mind; I'll call first time I get the chance."

"We shall all be glad to see you, and will be sure to give you a warm reception."

"You take it easy, considering."

"What's the use in taking it any other way? Look here, Boggs, we must make a deal."

"That's the talk," said Long Charley. "Now, we are coming down to business. Let's make a deal. How much will you give to be sent back to your friends?"

"Wait a minute," said Ned; "don't go so fast. Where's Mr. Luckey? I want to know all about him first."

"I expect he's looking for you," growled Boggs. "That's where he was last time I heard of him. Ha, ha, ha! He'll look, but he won't find you—oh, no!"

Both men lighted their pipes, and stood with their backs to the fire, looking at Ned, waiting for him to say something more.

But Young Klondike was silent. He was pondering upon the situation. The fact was he thought he had the "biggest end of the stick," even as it was, for a poor job had been made of the hand tying, and Ned knew that with one big effort he could get free.

All at once he threw out his hands and grabbed Bill Boggs by the legs, pulling them from under him and sending the fellow down on his back with such force as to completely stun him.

"Hey! What in time!" roared Charley, trying to grab him.

But he drew back in a hurry, for Ned's hand closed on his one revolver, which had been thrown carelessly aside, and turning half over he covered Long Charley, crying:

"Throw up your hands or you're a dead man, Charley! Quick!"

Charley's hands went up in a hurry, but he did not stop with that. A panic seemed to seize him and he turned and ran out of the cave as fast as his legs could carry him.

Ned sent two shots flying after the fellow, but they had no other effect than to make him run faster than ever, and in a moment he had disappeared.

To have attempted to follow him would have been a great mistake, and Ned did nothing of the kind, but instantly turned his attention to Boggs.

"Well, I seem to have turned the tables here," he murmured, as he took the cord which he had thrown off his own hands, and proceeded to secure the tough who lay entirely unconscious.

Ned might have supposed that he was dead, but he breathed heavily.

It was easy to see that when he fell he struck on the back of his head and the blow stunned him, all of which gave Young Klondike this chance which he lost no time in making the most of.

Every instant he expected Charley back with the other tough, who as yet had not been seen.

"I must act quick if I want to hold my own here,"

thought Ned, and he made a hasty survey of the cave.

It was fitted up as a sort of camp. There was a table and three chairs, and dishes and cooking utensils. There were two rifles hanging up against the rocks, and old clothes and boots and blankets, and two bearskins.

Evidently Bill Boggs knew a great deal more about Young Klondike's winter diggings than Ned did himself; it was easy to see that the place had been fitted up long before.

Ned hastily possessed himself of one of the rifles, and hid the other. Then he hurried out of the cave, for the entrance was not far away.

As soon as he came into the light he saw at a glance that he had come into another one of those strange depressions so common in these mountains, which passes under the name of "sink."

It was like a big bowl, for on all sides the cliffs sloped down to a level plain about a mile across.

Away out on the plain somewhere near the middle, was a rude hut, but although Ned looked attentively he could not see anyone moving around it.

If it had not been for Dick he would have gone right on to investigate, but as it was he returned to the cave.

Bill Boggs had just come to his senses, and was looking pretty sick.

"Huh. So you got the best of me, did you, Young Klondike," he growled. "That fall was a crusher! Where's Long Charley? Have you killed him?"

"I've settled his hash; never you mind how," replied Ned, coolly. "It rather looks as if I'd turned the tables on you, my friend."

"Well, now, you have!"

"Are you as ready to try a deal as you were a few moments ago?"

"Don't know but what I am. I want to get free," retorted Boggs.

"Very good; then you'll answer a few questions, and look out that you answer them correctly. Where's Dick Luckey, first of all?"

"I don't know nothing about him. I lassoed you down there in the gorge all right, but I didn't even see him."

"Humph! That's it, is it?"

"That's the how of it."

"You're sure you are getting it straight?"

"Hope I may die if I ain't! Say, Young Klondike—"

"Wait. I'll do the questioning. What place is this?"

"Why, this is my diggings."

"Yours? You are on my land, I fancy!"

"Well, perhaps I am, but I worked this claim before you ever came here."

"You worked another claim on my land; down there by the mouth of the gorge, I mean."

"Well, so I did. Have you found it?"

"Of course."

"I knew you would. Blamed rich, ain't it?"

"It will do."

"Not so rich as this one, though. Pshaw! You can't own it all! I started this claim last spring. Here's where I was heading for when you thought I was getting ready to go to Nine Mile creek. Why should I have done anything like that when I'd laid in provisions enough to last six months right here in this? You see, Young Klondike, you don't know everything, although I've no doubt you think you do."

"Thank you for your information, Boggs," replied Ned, in the same quiet way. "I bought this land over a year ago, so if you located on it last spring, you are a claim jumper of the worst kind; but never mind about that now. I'm going to turn you over to the Northwestern police; I think I've got pull enough to have you run out of the Klondike altogether, so it won't make much difference about the claim."

Now Boggs thought so, too, and the thought made him decidedly nervous. He had been holding back, hoping to see something of Long Charley, but as the moments passed, and the fellow did not appear he grew more than ever anxious to make terms.

"Look here, Young Klondike," he began, "what you want is to get back to the hut—ain't that it?"

"Sure."

"Then you'll never do it without my help."

"Perhaps you'll help me?"

"I was just going to offer to do it. Promise to let me go free, and I'll guide you back."

Now this was all very well, but Young Klondike had another plan.

The country was filled with such fellows as Boggs; as fast as one was driven out another cropped up. Ned's idea was to civilize this man and make a comfortable neighbor of him, and he thought he saw his chance to do it.

At the risk of having to fight Charley and the other man, he sat down on a rock and laid the rifle across his knees.

"Bill Boggs," he said, "I am going to make you a proposition; you can accept it or reject it just as you please, but I make it in all good faith, and I want you to live up to it if it meets your views."

Boggs stared. He was not used to such mild talk as this. He wondered what was coming next.

"I don't want to be hoggish," continued Ned, "and at the same time I don't want to be imposed upon. Now, then, you guide me back to the hut and let up on this war between us, and I'll give you a deed of whatever claim you may have started up here, and you can pay me the price in installments as your work goes on. Come, what do you say?"

"Well, that's fair, shake, pard," said Boggs, brightening up at once.

A blackmailer by instinct himself he had expected nothing but to have to turn over his hidden dust.

"I mean to be fair and I want to be neighborly. I see no use in fighting; let's meet on sensible ground. How does that strike you? Do you agree?"

"Well, yes, I do, providing the price is right, but

I don't want to be tied down by the nose. I don't care to have to pay a hundred thousand dollars for the claim."

"We'll knock off the hundred and call it a thousand. How does that strike you now?"

Boggs seemed really moved.

"Boss, you're white," he said; "hang me, if you ain't. If there was more of your kind on the Klondike there'd be fewer of mine, and that's right."

"Is it a go?"

"It is. Where's Charley?"

"Never you mind about Charley. I'm going to help you up now, and you are going to lead me back to the hut."

"But I can't get to the hut. You've headed me off. We've never been able to pass them rocks what you threw down."

"You can pilot me to the rocks, and I'll do the rest."

"I can do it and I will. Help me up and we'll start right now."

Young Klondike's plan seemed to have worked like a charm.

He lifted Boggs to his feet.

"Can't you untie my hands?" pleaded the tough. "I could walk a blame sight better if you would only do that."

"You'll have to walk the best you can without it," replied Ned, "for untie you I won't, until we are down in the gorge again; after that we'll see."

"All right; follow me," growled Boggs, and he led the way back through the cave with unsteady step, for the blow on the back of his head had been a terrible one, and the man was really a good deal shaken up.

They had not far to go before they came to the platform which overhung the gorge.

"We pull each other up here sometimes," said Boggs. "We find it a blame sight easier than climbing over the rocks. Still there is another way."

"It's the other way I want," replied Ned. "What are you listening for?"

"Listening to hear if Dick Luckey or that blamed little runt of a detective are moving about down there."

"Don't you make remarks about my friends. They are going to be yours now."

"Are they? Well, I don't know whether I want that detective for my friend or not; howsoever, there'll be no quarreling as long as you live up to your bargain. Come on."

Boggs walked along over the platform in the direction of the hut for a considerable distance, until all at once turning a point of rocks they came to a narrow rift, leading abruptly down into the gorge.

It was terribly steep and filled with loose stones, but it was a way down, and Ned could see that it would lead him to the place where he wanted to go.

"Go on," he said. "What are you stopping here for?"

"Young Klondike, have some mercy on a feller. It's as much as my life is worth to go down there with my hands tied."

"What would you have me do? I don't feel like taking any chances until I'm safe with my friends."

"Leave me here. I'll take care of myself. Later on I'll come and see you and we'll talk business, but now——"

"Stand away from that hole! What are you trying to cover up?" cried Ned.

He noticed that Boggs was backing around against the rocks in a peculiar fashion as though he was trying to conceal the entrance to an opening which led under the ledge.

Very likely he never would have thought anything about the hole if his attention had not been called to it so.

"What do you mean?" demanded Boggs, trying to put on an appearance of innocence which anyone could see was assumed.

"Hello! So you hide your gold in there, do you?" chuckled Ned. "I should think it would be safer to keep it in the cave."

Boggs began to bluster. It was all nonsense; there was no gold there, and so on.

"We'll see about that," said Ned, and stooping down he pulled out two large bags heavy with dust.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, "so we've struck a bonanza, have we? And what's this?"

It was only a big nugget which lay behind the bags.

Ned saw that at the least calculation it must weigh seventy-five pounds.

He was just about to drag it out of the cave for a better look, when all at once someone grabbed him by the feet and pulled him down on his face.

"Ha, ha! Now we've got you, Young Klondike! Come out of that! Come out of that! This time there will be no monkey business—you are going to die!"

And four strong hands seized the boy and dragged him out of the hole.

It was Long Charley and the other tough.

They stood over Ned covering him with their revolvers.

Serious business it certainly was with Young Klondike.

He felt that they meant to kill him, that he was face to face with death.

CHAPTER IX.

EVERYTHING GONE.

DICK was about the worst puzzled fellow on the Klondike when he found that Ned was missing.

Now, the mystery of the abruptly ending trail had to be solved.

Dick instantly jumped at the correct conclusion, that Ned had been caught by a lasso and pulled up on the rocks.

He shouted once or twice but got no answer, for Bill Boggs had already hurried Ned into the cave, and Dick's shout never reached his ears.

Dick tried his best to solve the mystery, and finding that it was out of his power, started back after the detective at all possible speed.

It was tough work getting over the fallen rocks. Dick thought at one time that he never would be able to handle the ladder alone, but at last he managed it, and coming down on the other side, burst into the hut with the sad news about Ned.

Imagine the excitement which followed this announcement!

The Unknown seized his rifle and ran right out of the hut.

"I knew it!" he cried. "I told Young Klondike how it would be! Come on, Dick! We'll rescue him if it takes a leg!"

"You don't go without me," said Edith, taking her rifle down from over the fire-place. "After this we all keep together. I won't hear to any more of these separate expeditions; trouble comes out of them every time."

So for Young Klondike when he lay a prisoner in the cave there was some hope, for the Unknown led the rescue, and when the little detective started to carry his tall hat to any given point it generally got there, no matter how difficult the place might be to reach.

But whatever he may have thought about it, Young Klondike, of course, did not know that there was any rescue in the wind, and when he found himself again captured the case looked pretty black.

"Don't shoot!" he cried, holding up both hands. "Don't shoot, boys! Bill and I have come to an understanding. It ain't war between us any more."

"Ha, ha, ha! Who says it isn't! Shoot, boys! We've got him again! He won't turn the tables on us this time!" shouted Boggs, who stood a free man now, and had his revolver aimed at Ned like the other two.

Young Klondike, lying on his back, determined to sell his life dearly at all events.

Dropping his hands he whipped out his revolver and fired.

The shot took Long Charley in the arm, and his revolver fell upon the snow.

"Gosh! I'm a goner!" yelled Charley.

Boggs and the other fired at Ned then, and no doubt would have killed him if their aims had been steadier, but at this very instant three shots rang out from the rift, and up came Dick, Edith and the Unknown.

"Down 'em! Down 'em!" cried the detective. "Don't let them escape! There's no safety for us till they are captured!"

Again and again the rifles spoke, but for some reason the balls all flew wide of the mark, and the three toughs, taking to their heels, managed to gain the cave unharmed.

Ned was on his feet in an instant.

"Don't fire any more!" he cried. "It's only a waste of powder. Besides, you know I don't like killing. Let's take it easy; we'll capture them yet! We'll do it in some other way."

"They'd have killed you, all right enough, if Dick hadn't been just as prompt as he was," said the Unknown. "Oh, Ned, Ned, you are always getting into scrapes and leaving us to get you out again. How came you up here, anyhow? What does it all mean?"

"I'm not a bit worse than you are, as far as that goes," laughed Ned. "Haven't we helped you out of many a scrape? But come, there's no use talking. We've got to act. Until we can run these fellows off our land, life ain't safe."

But in spite of Ned's remark there was a good deal of talking done, and no more was made until the situation had been fully explained.

"Now, then," said the Unknown, "are we going to hunt those fellows down, or what are we going to do? I vote we lug this gold back to the hut and await results. That big nugget is a corker and ought to go to Dawson. You reckon it ours, don't you, Ned?"

"Why, we certainly have a good claim to it," replied Ned, "but I think we better leave the gold alone and try to capture Bill Boggs."

"Same here," said Dick, "but I wish Edith was safe back in the hut."

"I'm just as safe here as anywhere else, and I won't hear to going back without you," replied Edith. "Suppose we make a move for the cave now? I believe we are sharp enough to get the best of a fellow like Boggs every time."

"I was thinking if we could only get down into that sink, without going back to the cave, it would be the best way," said Ned. "Then we could surprise them for fair, and like enough capture them before they knew where they were at."

"Think there's any chance?" asked Dick. "From the way you describe the place, Ned, it don't look to me as though there was."

"We might make a try for it. There don't seem to be any reason why we should not climb right on up over the rocks here, and if we go far enough we are sure to come to the edge of the sink."

"That's the talk. Let's try it," said the Unknown. "I believe in surprises, and I'd like to give those fellows one if we can."

So they started on through the rift, which followed the rise of the rocks above them.

It was a hard pull, but at last they reached the top and there lay the big sink right at their feet.

"What a wonderful hole!" cried Dick. "By gracious, if there's any place we've seen since we came to the Klondike where there ought to be good gold digging, it's right down there!"

"That's my theory," replied Ned. "I believe that is as rich a pocket as there is in the region. I do, indeed."

"It's certainly worth investigating if we get the chance," said Edith. "Your theory is, Ned, that the

gold has been washed down from these rocks when the sink was formed?"

"That's it."

"What's the soil down there?"

"How could I tell when it's all under snow, but I've no doubt it's sand and gravel; it's just the right formation all around here for gold."

While all this mining talk was going on, the boys were looking sharp for some sign of the enemy in the sink.

"Strange we can't see anything of them," remarked Dick.

"Yes, for they must be there," replied Ned. "They ran straight for the cave and, of course, they must have gone into it."

"Unless there's some other way of getting down into the gorge," added the detective; "but after all the most plausible explanation is that they are around the fire in the cave."

"There's just one thing for us to do, and that's to sneak down and see. I believe it can be done over there where you see that break."

"A good mile away," said Dick.

"That's what it is, but we've got to make a move of some kind."

"We'll try it! Come on!" cried the detective, starting off over the snow. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, we'll get there somehow, but we'll never make anything by all this talk."

It proved to be more than a mile around to the other side of the sink, but when they reached the spot Young Klondike's party found themselves amply repaid for their trouble.

There was no difficulty in descending here.

In a few moments they were down in the sink, but up to this time they had seen nothing of the three men.

"It's mighty strange that they don't show themselves here," said the Unknown. "What are we to do now, boys?"

"It will be a fight to the death if we meet them in the open here," said Dick. "I don't know but what after all we'd better go back."

"No," said Edith, "we've started in to do it. Let's do it. I see no use in going back."

"Nor I," added Ned. "The risk is just as great in one place as another. Let's push ahead."

"We'll tackle that hut first," said the detective. "Remember, now, if they come out on us we've got to do some tall firing, and if we make a miss of it we are goners—that's all."

"Trust me," said Edith. "I don't like killing any more than Ned, but we are four against three and I think we ought to be able to hold our own."

But the unexpected happened then as is very often the case.

They walked straight up to the hut and saw no sign of the enemy.

The door stood partly open and the Unknown, peering inside, saw that the place was deserted.

"It's a shaft-house!" he exclaimed. "Here's your

diggings, Young Klondike; do you suppose they can be down below?"

The mouth of the shaft occupied almost the entire space inside the hut, but the strangest part of the business was that they could discover no dump nor any evidence that earth had been taken out, and yet there was the shaft extending down to a depth of some twenty-five feet.

"How in the world did they dispose of the stuff they took out?" queried Ned, as he peered down into the hole.

"Probably they dug it last spring as Boggs told you, and the dirt was scattered about over the ground," said the Unknown. "I reckon you'd find it if you could look under the snow."

"That don't account for it; they've been digging here ever since we came to our winter camp. There ought to be some traces of their work."

"Then if you won't accept my explanation, the only thing is to go down and see," said the Unknown. "The ladder is all ready for us, we may as well explore."

Now, in the prospecting shafts on the Klondike, as elsewhere, it is not customary to deal much with ladders. A rude windlass with its rope and tub generally answers the purpose, and when one wants to go down into the shaft he just steps into the tub and the rope is unwound.

There was such an arrangement here, but there was also a ladder, and Young Klondike was the first to descend into the shaft.

He had no sooner reached the bottom than he gave a shout, and suddenly disappeared.

"Ned has discovered something!" cried Dick, and down he started on the ladder calling to Edith and the detective to remain behind and stand guard.

"This way, Dick! This way!" Ned's voice was heard calling. "The mystery is explained. There's another cave here. The shaft is only a natural opening. Their working was all done below."

And Ned appeared at the mouth of a narrow passage which led off from the shaft.

"Hello, down there!" cried the Unknown. "What have you struck?"

"A cave!" shouted Dick.

"Yes, and there's a stream running through it which is not frozen," called Ned. "You and Edith had better come down and have a look. There's nobody in sight here and you are just as safe as you are up there."

When Edith reached the bottom of the shaft Ned was waiting for her, and he led the way through a narrow passage into an extensive cavern which seemed to extend a long way under ground.

A stream ran through it, and scattered along its bank were piles of washed-out gravel, several pans and various mining tools, showing that it was here that Bill Boggs and his companions had done their work.

"Well, well, well! This is great!" cried the Unknown, "but where did you get the lantern that we

are having the pleasure of using to see all this by, dear boy?"

"Found it right here with the rest of the things," replied Ned. "Oh, there's no doubt that we've struck their diggings. Here's a winter camp for you. How comfortable we could live here; but it don't tell us what has become of those fellows right now, and that's what I want to know."

"Sure they ain't watching us at the present time?"

"I reckon not. I've looked and listened. There don't seem to be any sign of them."

"Let us follow this cave along a bit. No doubt it runs right into the other."

"I'd like to see how this sand pans out before we leave here."

"No objection, only it will take time."

"Keep your eye peeled, Zed, while Dick and I work out a few pans."

"Edith and I will push ahead and explore," said the Unknown, and they moved on through the cave, leaving Young Klondike and Dick to tackle the gravel, which proved to be enormously rich.

The first pan yielded nearly twenty dollars, the second ran up as high as fifty-four, the next was thirty-eight and the next twenty-three, after which there was one of sixty dollars. That was the best and the last, for then Edith and the Unknown returned with word that they had been through the other cave and found it deserted.

The detective described everything so accurately that there could be no doubt they had hit the right place.

"We were all over it, and out on the platform," he added. "We went back to the place where you were captured, Ned, and never saw a soul. The gold is gone, those three scoundrels are gone, the big nugget is gone—everything is gone but We, Us & Co. Now, then, what's to be done?"

"What odds?" laughed Young Klondike; "we are all together again and have struck it rich, same as we always do. Let's stop right here and work this claim, for we own the mine."

A claim from which one could pan out one hundred and ninety-five dollars in less than an hour was worth working indeed.

CHAPTER X.

ATTACKED BY THE ENEMY AGAIN.

PROBABLY it was an unwise decision which Young Klondike so hastily formed—he thought so later on.

But the temptation to work further on a strike so rich as this in the cave was too strong to be resisted, and the boys kept steadily at it until dark.

The result was most satisfactory. Over two thousand dollars was there to show for the work they had done.

"Well," declared Ned, "I'm mighty glad Bill

Boggs went back on his agreement. Why, just think of it, Dick! I offered him this claim for a thousand dollars! A hundred thousand wouldn't buy it from me now."

"Well," said Dick, "it only goes to show how foolish people are to quit mining just because it's winter. Look at what we have made this winter mining under the snow."

Now all this work had been done by lantern light, and Ned's watch told him that darkness had come upon them at least an hour before.

For that length of time they had seen nothing of either the Unknown or Edith, who were supposed to be in the main cave getting ready for the night.

The boys now gathered up their gold and pushed on to the other cave. Dick had gone through before with the Unknown to guide him, and so knew the way.

When they reached it they found that Edith had a big fire going, and supper partly cooked.

"Plenty of provisions here, boys," she exclaimed, "but it does seem like stealing to come right in here and take possession of another party's camp."

"Stealing nothing," cried Dick. "Why, the whole place belongs to us; as for the provisions they helped themselves to ours all right. Where's Zed?"

"Gone out on the platform about half an hour ago," replied Edith. "He has been in and out right along. He got the wood and built the fire. I guess he'll be back in a few minutes now."

But the detective did not return until midnight, and most anxious were the boys about him in the meantime.

They went out on the platform, and back on the sink, searching everywhere, but all to no purpose, when they suddenly saw him coming up the rift.

"Who goes there?" challenged Ned, for at first he did not know who he had to deal with.

"Young Klondike forever!" shouted the Unknown's voice. "Can't you see my plug hat? By the Jumping Jeremiah, I've been back to camp."

"No!" exclaimed Ned. "What in the world did you want to do anything like that for without letting Edith know?"

"To improve the shining moment, dear boy! We are not safe here. I felt that I must know how things stood at the camp."

"And how did you find everything?"

"It's all right so far."

"See anything of the enemy?"

"Not a thing. I think we'd better get right back there, however."

"Not to-night?"

"Yes, to-night."

"And why?"

"Because it's going to snow. As sure as shooting there's going to be a big storm, and we ought to get home before it comes on."

Ned looked up at the sky and was forced to admit that the appearances were all that way.

"What do you say, Dick?" he asked.

"The Unknown's advice is always good."

"Then we'll follow it. We'll start down by lantern light, but how in the world are we going to get Edith over the rocks at the iron gate in the dark?"

"I've fixed another ladder on this side," said the Unknown, "and I think it can be managed all right. Only thing I felt afraid of was that Bill Boggs and his partners had gone over. To tell the truth, boys, that's why I went down."

"Ah! And you found they had!" exclaimed Ned. "I can read it in your face."

"That's right. Either they or someone else went over since we passed the iron gate, for the ladders were differently placed."

Here was startling intelligence. It might mean any kind of trouble at the winter camp.

Work had progressed there steadily, and quite a large amount of gold had been accumulated. Young Klondike did not care to run the risk of losing this, and there were the men to be considered also. In case of an attack, they might be induced to surrender and join the enemy.

Taking everything into consideration it was certainly time to go back to the winter camp.

They hurriedly returned to the cave and explained the situation to Edith. The gold was packed up in such shape as to be most easily carried, and with no other light to guide them than a flickering lantern they were soon making the best of their way down through the rift, a most dangerous descent where one false step meant death.

But the greatest care was observed and they reached the gorge in safety, and then it began to snow.

"I told you so," said the Unknown. "There's a regular blizzard upon us. The sooner we get into camp the better. I feel afraid of trouble at the iron gate."

They pressed on as rapidly as possible, and soon drew near the wall of fallen rock which cut off their retreat from the gorge.

By this time the storm was upon them full force. It was really wonderful the rapidity with which it came.

All in an instant they found themselves enveloped in the whirling flakes. The wind swept up the gorge, howling dismally and blowing the snow into their faces as they advanced.

Just about that time they would have given anything to have been at the iron gate.

All at once a shot rang out—then there was another and another.

The sound seemed to come from a distance.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'm afraid there is trouble over there!" gasped the Unknown, stopping short; "those shots are from the other side of the iron gate."

This meant the winter camp, of course, and it sent them on all the faster.

Getting over the rocks was difficult and dangerous, but the detective, who had done it several times in

the dark, now led the way and they were soon safely down on the other side.

"There's the hut!" cried Dick. "See the lights?"

"Everything looks all right there," said Edith. "Perhaps after all there is no trouble. The shots may have come from somewhere else."

"It means trouble wherever they came from," said Ned, "but no matter now. Let's push on and get under cover as soon as possible. I'm tired of being out here in the snow."

The light burned steadily in the window of the hut, and as no sound reached their ears, Young Klondike came to the conclusion that the shots had no meaning for them, and that everything was going to turn out all right.

Imagine then the feeling which came over them all when, arriving at the camp they flung open the door, and saw Nat Trested and Francois lying upon the floor bathed in blood.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, there's been an attack!" cried the Unknown. "Bill Boggs has butchered everybody! Oh, why did we ever leave this place?"

But it was not quite so bad as that.

Neither Francois nor poor Trested were dead, although both were unconscious when the detective rushed in.

Everything was topsy-turvy. The hut had been rifled, and everything of value taken.

The rest of the miners had disappeared.

"So much for leaving one's business!" groaned Ned. "Oh, why didn't I stay right here!"

"No use crying about it now! Fly round and see what you can do for these poor fellows! I don't believe either one of them are dead. No; here's Francois with his heart still beating. How is it with Nat?"

Dick, who was bending over poor Trested, declared that he still lived.

"We can save them and we must," cried the Unknown. "Hot water, Edith! Old rag—scissors—fly around everybody. Bolt the door, Ned! Bar it! Hold on, though; what about the dogs?"

Now this was the way the Unknown always went on at times of excitement, but although he talked he always worked to the best advantage as he was doing now.

While Edith raked up the fire and put the kettle on the Unknown stripped off the upper garments from poor Francois, revealing an ugly bullet wound near the heart.

"The dogs are gone, and so are the sleds," reported Ned, coming in from the shed.

"Lock the door—bolt it—bar it! We may look for an attack any moment!" the Unknown replied. "How is it with Nat, Dick? Francois is all right. I can snake out this ball in no time. He'll live, and don't you fear."

"Nat's got it in the shoulder," reported Dick. "It's only a scratch, though. I think he must have had a blow on the head, too, for his forehead is all

swelled. It looks to me as if they had both been knocked out with a big club."

"Hark?" exclaimed Edith, suddenly. "What was that?"

"Nothing but the howling of the wind," replied the Unknown; "bring us some of the hot water, Edith. I want to wash out this wound before I tackle the ball."

Edith hastened to obey, but in a moment the strange cry which attracted her attention was heard again.

Ned flung the door open, and peered out into the storm.

"Shut that door!" roared the Unknown. "Do you want to kill Francois, letting the cold air in on him? Shut that door."

"I'll shut it now," said Ned, quietly. "I've seen all I want to see. We are attacked by Bill Boggs and a band of Coppermine Indians. We've got all we can do to save our lives."

CHAPTER XI.

THAT TERRIBLE NIGHT IN THE HUT.

"FRANCOIS! Francois! Oh, Francois! Speak! Tell us what happened!"

Again and again the Unknown called the name of the faithful habitant.

He was trying to call him back to life.

Many times in his long and varied experience had the little detective seen this seeming miracle performed.

"When a wounded man's vitality runs low he may die if left alone, but on the other hand if his attention can only be attracted he may revive, and there is no way of doing it so effectual as shouting the patient's name aloud.

"Francois, Francois, Francois!" cried the Unknown, again and again.

It seemed to have no effect, although the wounded dog driver continued to breathe.

Ned stirred the fire and joined Dick at the door, where the latter stood in a listening attitude.

"How is it now, Dick?" he asked.

"I haven't heard anything of them for some little time, Ned."

"Have they gone, think?"

"No, sir. I believe they are hiding in the shaft-house. It's cold out there in the storm, and they can't keep the attack going all the time—at least that's my idea."

"More than likely you are right. Oh, this is a tough situation! I wish to goodness I had only let well enough alone and never bothered these men!"

"It would have come sooner or later, Ned. Really, you can't blame yourself. Who can foresee these things?"

Ned sighed. He was thinking of Edith who sat

calmly beside the unconscious habitant assisting the Unknown in his efforts to restore him to life.

The situation was most certainly a terrible one.

All knew now that Ned was quite right when he spoke of the Indians.

Three times during the hour which had elapsed since the discovery was made, had Boggs and the redskins made a violent attack on the hut.

Each time the attack had been successfully resisted. There were loopholes in the log walls built for this very purpose. To be inside on the defensive gave Young Klondike's party a decided advantage over the enemy. They had come in at the nick of time while Boggs and his gang were absent at the other hut rifling the stores in the search for gold which the tough believed had been concealed there.

If Young Klondike had arrived twenty minutes earlier he would have had an open fight in the snow on hand.

Had he arrived ten minutes later it would have been just the same.

As it was, here he was besieged in the storm, with one dead man up-stairs in the loft, and another apparently dying.

Surely the situation could not well be very much worse, for, with the exception of the hut, Bill Boggs and his toughs and Indians had full possession of the winter camp.

Worse than all, there was no chance to get away either for the besieged or the enemy. There they were, and there they were likely to stay until the storm was over.

It is not all plain sailing, this gold mining on the Klondike. No, not by any means.

"I'd like to know where they are," said Ned, after a little. "If we could only sneak out on them and capture Boggs, we might send the whole gang flying. I'd take my chances on it if I was sure they were at the mine."

"No, no! Don't think of it!" cried Dick.

"Hush!" cried Edith. "Francois is coming to his senses at last."

It was so. After the long period of unconsciousness life was returning to the wounded man.

Had the detective really succeeded in calling him back from the door of death?

He thought so as he bent over him listening to the feeble voice of the poor dog driver. Yes, the Unknown took all the credit to himself.

"What is he saying?" asked Ned. "I can't hear a word."

The Unknown motioned for silence.

Then, after a little, he came over to where Ned and Dick were standing, and whispered:

"Let him sleep now. It is the only hope for him. Nothing else will save him from poor Nat Trested's fate."

"Strange that Nat should die and he live, seeing that he is so much the worse wounded of the two," said Dick.

"What does he say?" asked Ned. "You know how anxious we are to know."

"Oh, I couldn't question him much, but I got out of him enough to know that you were right. Both he and Nat were knocked down by an Indian's club: That was after Boggs shot them. They were the only two who made a fight."

"It is as I supposed then. The others deserted to the enemy?"

"Promptly. They are with them now. By the Jumping Jeremiah, I hope they freeze to death out there; it will serve them blame well right."

"Hark! They are coming again!" breathed Dick. "It's a matter of life or death with them anyhow. They've got to get in by the fire or freeze, for there's no chance to warm up in the shaft-house, and it's getting colder and colder every minute. I don't think it can snow very long."

"Are you sure you heard them?" asked the Unknown, moving toward the window against which a big box had been nailed. The glass had been broken at the first attack, and nothing but a shower of bullets from within prevented the enemy from taking advantage of the window to force an entrance to the hut.

"Don't touch the box, for goodness sake!" cried Ned. "That's just what they want. Dick, can you see anything where you are?"

"Yes," said Dick, who was at one of the loop-holes. "They are moving around the hut busy at something. I can't make out just what."

"Let me see," said the detective.

"Wait!" breathed Dick, in sudden haste, and putting his rifle to the loop-hole he blazed away.

There was a horrible yell outside in the storm after which all was still.

"What have you done now, Dick?" asked Edith, with a shudder. "Killed one of them? Oh, dear, dear, this is a terrible night."

"We've got to kill them or they'll kill us," said the detective, grimly. "It was an Indian who went down into the snow that time I fancy. I only wish it had been Bill Boggs."

But it wasn't Boggs, for at the same moment the voice of the arch villain was heard shouting:

"Hello there! Hello inside the hut! Hello! Hello!"

"Hello!" roared the Unknown, whose voice was like a fog horn.

"That you, Young Klondike?"

"Yes!"

"Well, hear the last proposition I shall make. Either you surrender or we'll slaughter you to a man. We'll stand no more of this sharp shooting business—do you understand?"

"And if we surrender, what then?" roared the Unknown.

"We'll make terms after you have done it. Open the door and let us in. We'll talk it out then, and not before."

"Never!" bawled the Unknown. "If you want the door open, open it yourself!"

Bang! Bang! Once more Dick's rifle spoke.

Again there was a dismal cry, after which silence came.

"There goes another," said Dick, quietly. "But it won't do any good, I'm afraid. They are keeping right at it."

"Right at what?" asked the Unknown. "Can't see anything out of my loop-hole here."

"Come here and try it, then," said Dick. "You may not see anything just now, but if you wait a minute you will."

The Unknown pressed his eye to the loop-hole and all waited breathlessly for him to speak.

At last he drew away with his face as white as the snow outside.

"Ye gods and little fishes! We are in for it now!" he exclaimed. "They've pulled down the shaft-house and are piling the boards against the hut. That can only mean one thing—they are going to burn us alive!"

CHAPTER XII.

SAVED BY AN AVALANCHE.

A DEAD silence came upon all as the Unknown made this startling announcement.

"That's what they are doing," said Dick, after a few moments, "and to save my life I don't see what we are going to do to prevent it."

"There's nothing we can do but to open the door," said Ned.

"And surrender?"

"Or fight it out."

"Either way would result in capture, and more than likely in death," said the Unknown. "Think of Edith's fate if she should fall into the hands of the Indians and be carried back among the mountains. Of course, she would never escape."

"But you mustn't think of me at all," said Edith, bravely. "Act as you think best without any reference to me—that's the only way."

"Surrender is not to be thought of," said Ned, emphatically, "and as for a rush I don't see how we are going to do it in the snow. It would only be to stand and fight till we are all dead, for you must remember they can't get away."

"Too late now to make any move," cried the detective. "Hark!"

A curious crackling noise was heard.

All listened attentively. It was only too evident that it was the crackling of flames.

"They've fired the boards," said Young Klondike, quietly. "This is the last stage of the game."

"Whosays it is?" demanded the detective. "Wait, dear boy! I'm not going to stay here to be burned like a rat in a trap. Watch me."

The Unknown ran up the ladder into the loft.

"He's going to try for the roof," cried Ned. "He

thinks he can pick off Boggs and Long Charley and drive them back, but I don't see what good that's going to do."

"They are mad to leave the hut!" said Dick. "Where are they going to get shelter for themselves?"

He hurried up the ladder after Ned, who had already followed the detective.

"Go slow!" he called. "Go slow! They may be on the roof themselves. My idea is that the burning brands don't touch the hut. I believe it's all a bluff to smoke us out. Beware."

"I'm fly!" called the Unknown. "I quite agree with you, but they haven't got on the roof yet, and we must be the first there."

There was a scuttle in the roof, but how to gain a footing after it was opened, seemed a problem. The roof was steep, and of course buried in snow. Yet, for all that, Bill Boggs was there, lying in wait for this very thing.

The Unknown cautiously removed the scuttle, and was about to look out, when suddenly a shot was fired down.

It was the greatest wonder in the world that the detective was not killed, but the bullet did not touch him.

He jumped back and banged away at the opening, for Boggs' head was there, and there was an Indian's, too, and the latter fired a shot at Ned.

"We've got you now? Surrender, or we'll do you!" roared Boggs. "The hut will be all in a blaze in a minute."

Bang! Bang!

Both the boys blazed away—that was their only answer.

"Kick them boards in closer! Let her go this time!" roared Boggs. "We'll burn them up, anyhow, and make the best of our way to the other hut."

After that the burning boards were heard coming against the hut.

No mistake about it this time!

In a moment smoke began to pour into the hut from all sides.

"Ned! Ned! Come down!" cried Edith. "The fire is working its way through. We've got to open the door."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Boggs, on the roof. "We are going to box you up again, Young Klondike. This is the end of it! This—"

Suddenly there was a rushing sound which increased with the seconds to a fearful roar.

"Look out! Jump, Bill! Jump!" yelled somebody on the ground.

And this was the last voice which spoke outside Young Klondike's winter camp that night.

All in an instant there was a fearful shock which shook the hut to its very foundation, and a great mass of snow came tumbling in through the open scuttle.

After that the stillness of death came.

Just how Young Klondike, Dick and the Unknown managed to get down that ladder, they hardly knew.

"What has happened?" gasped Edith. "Oh, what is it?"

"An avalanche," spoke a feeble voice from the bunk.

It was Francois.

The shock had aroused him.

Well used to the sights and sounds of that desolate region he at once divined what had happened to Young Klondike's winter camp.

And Francois was quite right.

The hut, it will be recalled backed up against the towering cliffs which formed the mouth of the gorge. This was the sunny side and the vast mass of snow collected during previous storms had gradually loosened and was unable to bear the weight of the fresh snow put upon it by the storm.

Suddenly it had given way, and rushing down the cliffs buried the hut twenty feet deep.

The fire was instantly extinguished and the lives of Bill Boggs' gang, both whites and Indians, were wiped out at one fell stroke.

In a most dramatic fashion had poor Nat Trested been avenged, and with this startling incident our story to all intents and purposes ends, for let it be understood there was no possibility of escape for the Boggs' gang and the Indians; they were killed to a man, and it was not until the following spring that their bodies were recovered.

And Young Klondike, Dick, Edith and the Unknown? What of them? Were they lost too?

By no means! Luck was with them—no pun intended on Dick—and the hut defended them from death.

For three days our friends remained close prisoners, and if they had been the kind who lie down before

their troubles they might have perished with the rest.

But of course they were not that sort at all, and equally of course they went right to work to dig out.

With nothing but boards for shovels—they pulled one of the bunks to pieces to get them—Young Klondike, Dick and the Unknown dug their way out of that fatal drift.

It took three days to do it.

At first Dick felt sure that the snow had entirely choked up the mouth of the gorge, and that there would be no such thing as digging out, but in the end they would just come up against the wall of rock on the other side.

No such bad fortune awaited them, however, and at last they saw the sun once more.

The drift was sixty feet wide and over thirty feet high, and under that the hut and the Boggs' gang lay buried.

It was July before it all melted away.

Once out the boys made their way to the other hut where they found their gold, and the Boggs' gold from the mountains, and, better still, the dogs.

By this time Francois was able to walk, and the whole party went by dog-sled up to the Wellsted mines, and later to Dawson City.

This ended work at Young Klondike's winter camp.

When spring came, mining was resumed on both claims, and very profitable they proved, especially the one in the cave.

In spite of the perils through which they had just passed, Young Klondike and his friends started off on a new venture a few weeks later.

This led them through many startling situations, all of which will be found described in the next issue of this series, entitled "YOUNG KLONDIKE'S DEATH CREEK DEAL; OR, DOWNING THE GOLD KING OF DAWSON."

[THE END.]

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